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The Body in Buddhism

The matter of the mind: a psychological investigation
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A. The impure body: a conventional perspective

1 The body in Buddhist training

1.1 WHY THE BODY? We are made up of *body and mind*. We *have* a body: we stand, we walk, we sit, we lie down, we travel, we do things. We *know* that we have a body and that there are other bodies, animate, inanimate and imagined. We *do* things and we *think* things. And we *talk* a lot.

In a word: we *act*. We act through the three doors of actions: the mind, speech, and the body. The three are closely interlinked. Some level or quality of mind is always behind what we say or do. And what we say or do affect how we think. Our bodies affect our minds, and our minds affect our bodies.

Buddhism is about how these three doors function together, what we can learn from them, how we can train them, and so free ourselves from suffering. Suffering is a profound and chronic dissatisfaction with these three doors through ignorance of their true nature and potential, and so we become the slaves of what we should master.

They are called “doors” (*dvāra*) because ideas and data from the external world flow through them into our minds, which then decide what to do with these perceptions. If any of our doors is weak, we will be weak persons. We will suffer for it. Suffering arises from the body as well as from the mind.

The Buddhist ideal is our having a healthy mind in a healthy body, and which as a result also moves others to become wholesome, that is, to be wise and compassionate beings. The best example of such an individual of course is *the fully self-awakened Buddha*. On account of the Buddha as the Teacher and as the Teaching itself, he continues to move countless beings across time, countries, races, religions and philosophies.

Although the body is a vital and integral part of the Buddhist life, we rarely discourse about it as a subject in itself. The main reason for this is because the body is so integrally woven into the Buddhist discourse that its presence and role are taken for granted. When we talk about moral training (*sīla, sikkhā*), for example, we understand that it involves the body and speech; when we talk about meditation, we know that the body must first be made comfortable, or at least manageable. And when we awaken, we do so in a Dharma “body.”

As such, it is useful, at least on this occasion, to examine the Buddhist training and life from the perspective of the body. This would surely bring into sharper relief, many important aspects of Buddhist wisdom that we have taken for granted, and more importantly, give greater focus and direction in our efforts towards awakening.

1.2 THE MIDDLE WAY.

1.2.1 The two extremes. At the very dawn of Buddhism, in the Buddha’s first teaching to the five monks (*pañca, vaggiya*),¹ **the Dhamma.cakka-p.pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), we see a dramatic discourse on the nature of the body.²

There (in the Deer Park at Isipatana) the Blessed One addressed the company of five monks thus:

“Bhikshus, there are these two extremes to be avoided by one who has gone forth. What are the two?

- (1) The devotion to sense-pleasures—it is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable], and

¹ That is, Koṇḍañña, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji: see SD 1.1 Streamwinner(1).

² S 56.11.2-3/5:421 & SD 1.1 (3).

- (2) the devotion to self-mortification—it is painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable].

Bhikshus, without turning to either of these extremes, there is the middle way awakened to by the Tathagata [Thus Come], that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana. (S 56.11.2-3/5:421) & SD 1.1 (3)

1.2.2 Devotion to sense-pleasures. “The devotion to sense-pleasures” (*kāma,sukh'allikānuyoga*) is described as being “**low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]**” (*hīno gammo puthujjaniko anariyo anatta,samhito*). The greatest danger of devotion to sense-pleasure is that it blinkers us into looking at the body only as an instrument of physical delight and ephemeral entertainment.

Such sense-pleasures are said to be **low** or inferior (*hīna*) because they hold us down, enslaving the body to it, preventing us from enjoying more sublime pleasures, especially those of the meditative states.

They are **vulgar**, the way of the masses (*gamma*), who delight in it and joke about it, not showing any respect for the body. Such people fail to realize the body’s true potential of attaining higher spiritual states and awakening.

This is understandable because such people are **worldly** (*puthujjanika*), that is, they know only of the body without cultivating much of the mind or heart. To them, pleasure is a measurable commodity to be collected, and other beings are the source of such carnal delights, so that only their bodies are appreciated without really feeling for them or loving them

Such people are unwilling or unable to truly feel or to love, to unconditionally accept others, without treating them as objects of pleasure. This is **ignoble** (*anariya*), not the way of the liberated saints. Understandably, they cannot see beyond the satisfactions of immediate sense-desires. They live like animals, caught in a predictable cycle of seeking food, sex and satisfaction.

They fail to understand two important qualities of the human body: firstly, that it is *impermanent*, and yet, secondly, it is *capable of higher spiritual joys*. As such, pleasure-devotees are caught in the rut of the materialistic view that this is our only life, and that our actions have no moral consequences. Such an attitude drowns us in the three intoxications (*mada*), that is, with youth, with health, and with life.

The Mada Sutta (A 3.39) says that monastics who are intoxicated with youth (*yobbana,mada*), with health (*ārogya,mada*) or with life (*jīvita,mada*) are thus led on to be reborn in suffering states, and such intoxicated monks would “give up the training and return to the low life.”³ The reason for this is clear: intoxication with youth, health and life is fixation with the body. When we are body-bound, fettered to only *physical* reality, we become blind to *spiritual* reality, that is, the cultivation of our potential for goodness and liberation. In this sense, devotion to sense-pleasures is **not connected with the goal**; it is unprofitable in the spiritual sense. [4.1.1]

1.2.3 Devotion to self-mortification. Note that while “the devotion to sense-pleasures” (*kāma,sukh'allikānuyoga*) is described as being “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]” (*hīno gammo puthujjaniko anariyo anatta,samhito*), “the devotion to self-mortification” (*atta,-kilamathānuyoga*) is said to be only “**painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]**” (*dukkho anariyo anatta,samhito*).

This is because despite being “painful,” self-mortification, with some moral virtue, can bring about a heavenly afterlife, that is, a transformation or bodily change, from corruptible flesh to a being of pure light or pure energy. But such a goal is still “ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” because we are still caught up in samsara, the endless cycle of lives and deaths, and not liberated from suffering.

This is not to say that all pleasures are evil or bad. The Buddha is just stating the facts, not pontificating any fiats. Bodily pleasures are at best momentary, and as such unsatisfactory, and there is no real essence. Such pleasures can never be fully satisfying because they need *external* stimuli, the sense-objects, to conjure them up. They are a virtual reality played up by the game console called the mind.

Wise lay practitioners understand such pleasures for what they are. When enjoying such pleasures, they know when to let go of them, and not to be devastated by lack of access to them. The renunciants,

³ A 3.39/1:146 f @ SD 59.8.

especially the monastics, voluntarily take the vows to avoid such sense-pleasure altogether so that their energies could be focussed directly to the attaining of awakening in this life itself. In both cases, the best way to free ourselves from the stranglehold of sense-pleasures is the experience of a greater pleasure, that of meditation [5.2.4].

Wise lay practitioners understand such pleasures for what they are. Sense-pleasures are like the sauce and spice for the food of worldly life. Taken in moderation and at a proper time enhance the joy of eating. Otherwise, not only is the food less palatable, our health is also badly affected. And yet there are those who avoid or give up sauce and spice altogether, because they are able to enjoy their meals as if every morsel is the first one.

1.3 IS THE BODY EVIL?

1.3.1 What is the body? The Buddha's first discourse (S 56.11) mentions the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification [1.2.1]. The self-indulgent generally regard *the body* as being good in itself, while the self-mortifier generally regard it as *evil*, or at best, that the body is merely a temporary state from which we need to liberate the eternal and blissful "soul."⁴ We will now examine whether we should regard the body as *evil*.

In the first place, **what is a body?** It is helpful to begin by saying that there are two kinds of bodies, namely, the physical body and the virtual body. Generally speaking, we can define the physical body as the one that we see and experience with our physical senses, and which the Pali word, *sarīra* (or more technically, *sarīra, kāya*) would usually refer to.⁵ This type of body is defined in the Suttas in this stock passage:

This body is form made up of the 4 elements [3.3], born from mother and father, built up on rice and porridge, subject to impermanence, rubbing, pressing, breaking up, and crumbling. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here.

(D 2; M 23, 109; S 35.105; A 9.15, 55.21; J 12) [3.4]

The virtual body is the *perceived* physical body or an *imagined* body, best represented by the generic Pali word, *kāya*, which can mean "body" in the literal sense (as a perceived body) or the figurative sense (as a "group"). Indeed, this is usually the way we would "see" a body." Let us begin examining the body at its barest minimum, that is, the *naked body*. In early Indian society, and even in Buddhism in general, the naked body (both male and female) are never viewed in a sexual manner, but as reflecting a *lack*.

In Buddhist mythology and art, beings of the suffering states (especially pretas and hell-beings) are usually depicted as being naked and ugly, open to the inclemencies of elements and other sufferings. Heavenly beings tend to be depicted as being finely dressed and attractive. All this reflects their karmic disposition: their lack is the result of their past bad karma. [4.1.2]

In our daily lives, we usually see the human body in a "socially constructed" way. We see humans as "bodily images" in their dresses, gestures, postures, and movements. The bodies of monastics, for example, are defined by a range of features, such as a shaven head, robes, an alms-bowl, and a decorous gait. This is clearly a *perception* of bodies, not just of the biological body, but of how it appears to others.⁶

1.3.2 The body is ephemeral and formative. The human body is "pliant" (*mudu, bhūta*)⁷ that is, subject to transformation, because our bodies are largely subject to our present actions. We behave as

⁴ Here, see **Is there a soul? SD 2.16 & Self and Selves**, SD 26.9.

⁵ *Sarīra* can also refer to a dead body or to bodily relics (*sarīrika dhātu*). The early Buddhist texts as a rule speaks of the body "with consciousness" (*sa, viññāṇaka, kāya*) [3.1]. See **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16), SD 9 (7d.1).

⁶ See Elizabeth Grosz 1994: 142; Susanne Mrozik 2007: 31 f.

⁷ This is suggested by Grosz's term, "pliant" (1994: 190), which I use along with another well know Buddhist adjective, "malleable" (*kammaniya*) [below], both of which textually apply to the mind, as found in the stock phrase, "With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free of defects, pliant, malleable, steady and totally undisturbed, he directs and inclines it to **knowledge and vision**. He knows: "This body of mine is endowed with form, composed of the 4 primary elements, born from mother and father, nourished with rice and porridge, subject to inconstancy, rubbing, pressing, dissolution, and dispersion. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here." (D 2.99a/2.83 = 11.52/1:215)

male or female, we are well or ill, attractive, repulsive or plain, very much depending on our own actions and the circumstances we are in. In great part, this is what scholars often refer to as “socially constructed,” meaning that bodies take certain or habitual forms under the influence of social norms or group trends. For example, men and women in a certain society or sub-culture would conform to traditions of ideals of masculinity and femininity.⁸

A body is also “malleable” (*kammaniya*) because it is largely the product of the individual’s karma. Our past karma initially determines our human birth, sex, looks, social status, and the circumstance we are born into. In a significant way, our karma (volitional actions) continues to shape our bodies, even bringing about significant changes in the present. As such, karma is not just “nature,” but also responds to how we “nurture” our bodies and minds.

“Malleable” as such also means that we are capable of changing the qualities of our bodies in due course. **The Sāleyyaka Sutta** (M 41) gives a full account of the ten courses of unwholesome karma can bring about unwholesome karmic results, especially by way of a bad rebirth. The ten courses of unwholesome actions (*dasa akusala kamma,patha*) are the actions of our body, speech and mind—the three doors of human action that would make us accumulate bad karma, resulting in undesirable circumstances for us. The ten courses of unwholesome actions are as follows:

3 unwholesome bodily acts

- (1) killing;
- (2) stealing;
- (3) sexual misconduct;

4 unwholesome verbal acts

- (4) speaking falsehood;
- (5) divisive speech;
- (6) harsh speech;
- (7) frivolous chatter;

3 unwholesome mental acts

- (8) covetousness;
 - (9) malevolence; and
 - (10) wrong views.
- (M 41,7-10/1:286 f), SD 5.7

The ten courses of wholesome actions (*dasa kusala kamma,patha*) are the proper ways we should conduct our body, speech and mind, so that our internal environment and external conditions are conducive to happiness and personal development. The ten courses of wholesome actions are as follows:

3 wholesome bodily acts

- (1) not-killing: compassion;
- (2) charity;
- (3) restraint, respect;

4 wholesome verbal acts

- (4) speaking the truth;
- (5) unifying speech;
- (6) pleasant speech;
- (7) beneficial talk;

3 wholesome mental acts

- (8) lovingkindness;
 - (9) non-violence; and
 - (10) right view.
- (M 41.11-14/1:287 f), SD 5.7

1.3.3 Why the five precepts? The teaching of the courses of actions (*kamma,patha*) [1.3.2] shows us that *we are what we do, say and think*. For our present purpose, it is useful to note that the three actions of body (*kāya,kamma*)—killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, and abstaining from them—are listed first. The reason for this clear and simple: philosophically, this has to do with the theory of values (axiology).

Life is of the greatest value to us, as without it nothing else can exist. Secondly, what makes our lives worth living (or value-added, as some might say)? The answer is: happiness, which basically has to do with having the basic necessities for living (food, clothing, shelter and health). If these are taken away from us, then we are deprived of our happiness. Hence, stealing or taking the not-given is wrong. Thirdly, to live our lives fully, we need some level of freedom, which basically means the right to say *no* to others, and to respect ourselves and others (which means accepting ourselves just as we are and cultivate ourselves from there). These three values underlie the first three precepts.

These three values are only useful and workable if we communicate based on truth. Truthful communication is the basis of personal and social growth. A healthy society is made up of healthy individuals, that is, those who have a high level of mental development. Hence, the fifth precept is about mindfulness, that is, keeping our minds free from intoxication and addiction of any kind.

⁸ Cf S Mroziak 2007: 31 f (which is a study of Śāntideva’s Śikṣā,samuccaya).

The five precepts are the basic rules that keep our body *human*, that is, we have the capacity and tendency for compassion, charity, respect, truth and wisdom. These precepts basically govern our body and speech, keeping them well-regulated and wholesome, so that individuals can interact happily and productively interact. In other words, the proper regulation of our bodies and speech conduces to a good society.

It should be noted here that the five precepts form the minimum code of moral conduct for the laity, but is clearly binding on renunciants and monastics, in fact, in a more profound and elaborate way, as they have more disciplinary rules than the laity. The purpose of the Vinaya rules, as they are called in monastic terms, is to remove worldly distraction from the renunciants so that he is able to focus his physical and mental energies to attaining awakening in this life itself.

1.3.4 The body is not evil, defilements are. From our discussion so far, it is clear that the body is *not* evil. Furthermore, the discussion above shows us that the body (and its capacity for speech and communication) is only a *tool* for social development and personal growth. The basic fact is that our bodies is a physical being, as we have seen, made up of the 4 elements [1.3.1], the details of which we will examine later [2.2]. A physical state is neither good nor evil; it depends on the mind behind that state. This is what we will now examine.

The Buddhist texts consistently teach that the body neither good nor evil. It is our *perception* of our bodies and how we relate to the physical world, that makes them good or evil. **The Nibbedhika Pariyāya Sutta** (A 6.63) explains the nature of our senses and sensuality, thus:

There are these five cords of sense-pleasures (*kāma,guṇa*):

Forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Sounds cognizable by the ear that are...delightful;

Smells cognizable by the nose that are...delightful;

Tastes cognizable by the tongue that are...delightful;

Touches cognizable by the body that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful.

—**Monks, these are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the noble discipline, they are called “cords of sensual pleasure” (*kāma,guṇa*).**⁹

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:

There is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:

What is beautiful in the world remains as they are.

So here the wise remove the desire for them.¹⁰ (A 6.63,3/3:411), SD 6.11

The point of this passage is clear: neither the body nor the world is evil, only defilements are.¹¹

1.3.5 Sexuality and celibacy. If the human body is not evil in itself, what about sexuality? Is sex evil? The third of five precept is the training rules against sexual misconduct, which is basically against having forcible sex (including with our spouse or partner), sex with minors and improper partners (as in adultery),¹² and when it distracts us from personal development.

⁹ *Api ca kho bhikkhave n’ete kāmā, kāma,guṇā nam’ete ariyassa vinaye vuccanti.* This is an enigmatic statement whose meaning is clarified in the verse that follows. See foll n.

¹⁰ This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, “plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizes that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing objects.” (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34). An almost identical verse (without line c) is found in **the Na Santi Sutta** (S 1.34).

¹¹ For a discussion on Buddhism and evil, see **Beyond Good and Evil**, SD 18.7.

¹² **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41) defines forbidden sex partners as follows: “those protected by their mother, protected by their father, [protected by their parents,] protected by their brother, protected by their sister, protected by a relative, one with a husband, one protected by the law,¹² even with one adorned with a string of garlands [in betrothal to another].” (M 41.8/1:286), SD 5.7.

Sexuality has its dangers (*ādīnava*) when we are addicted to it, or when we mistake a part of a person for the whole. The third precept allows consensual sex between eligible partners under proper conditions, but even then, they should know when not to indulge in it, such as when a partner says no. A real problem arises when we treat another as a sexual object, so that we are unable to see his total goodness.

Then there is the problem of age-limited sexuality, that is, we are only drawn to young partners, or partners of a certain age-group. If we do have such a tendency, it would be interesting to examine why we are so inclined. Could this be a sort of power-play of domination?

Age-appropriate responses are conducive to a healthy social relationship and personal development, but taming our sexual urges into interpersonal respect. **The Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Sutta** (S 35.127) contains an interesting teaching by the Buddha on age-appropriate relationship. The discourse records the rajah Udena visiting the forest monk Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja, and the following conversation occurs:

3 Seated thus as one side, the rajah Udena said this to the venerable Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja:

“How now, master Bhāra,dvāja, what is the cause, what is the reason, that these young monks, black-haired youths, endowed and blessed with youth, in the prime of life, who have still not fully enjoyed sense-pleasures,¹³ live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so?”

4 “Maharajah, this was said by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one,

‘Come now, monks,

towards those old enough to be your mothers, mentally regard them so;
towards those old enough to be your sisters, mentally regard them so;
towards those old enough to be your daughters, mentally regard them so.’

This, indeed, maharajah, is the cause, this is the reason, that these young monks, black-haired youths, endowed and blessed with youth, in the prime of life, who have still not fully enjoyed sense-pleasures, live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so.”

5a “But, master Bhāra,dvāja, wanton is the mind. Sometimes,

lustful mental states do arise towards those old enough to be our mothers;

lustful mental states do arise towards those old enough to be our sisters, too;

lustful mental states do arise towards those old enough to be our daughters, too.

5b Is there, master Bhāra,dvāja, another cause, master Bhāra,dvāja, that these young monks, black-haired youths, endowed and blessed with youth, in the prime of life, who have still not fully enjoyed sense-pleasures, live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so?”
 (S 35.127/4:110 f), SD 27.6a (2.4)

The conversation continues with Piṇḍola admonishing Udena on the recollection of the 32 body-parts and on sense-restraint [2.4]. Sex is unhealthy, in short, when it only allows us to see merely a part of the body during a fleeting window of time.

In **the Methuna Sutta** (S 7.47), the Buddha admonishes those keeping to the holy life (observing celibacy for personal development)—including monastics and those who have taken up the celibacy rule—to abstain from these seven “bonds of sexuality” (*methuna,samyoga*):

- (1) enjoying physical contact;
- (2) socializing (especially for the sake of entertainment);¹⁴

¹³ *anikīlitāvino* (pl, S 1:117,25 = 118,14 = 4:110,27 = 111,4), from *na-nikīlitāvi(n)* (mfñ) [cf vl S I 9,6: *a-nikkīl°*], “who has not finished playing,” ie one who has not yet enjoyed (sensual pleasures) in full; S 1:9,6 (*pathamena vaya-sā ~ī kāmesu*); *kāmesu akīlita-kīlo abhuttāvī akatakāmakīlo*, SA [so E° C°; S° °*kāmakāro*] = 10,20.

¹⁴ Elsewhere, the word *asamsaṭṭha* is used in this context. This is a clear allusion to the character of the forest eremite, a wandering forest monk. The expression, “(he) lives socializing” (*samsaṭṭhā viharissanti*) occurs at **Anā-gata,bhaya S 4** (A 5.80.5+6/3:109), SD 1.10(3.4). The **Vinaya** eg disapproves of the nun Thulla,nandā “living and socializing [in close proximity]” with unwholesome lay companions (Saṅgh 9 = V 4:239); Thulla,nandā’s female probationer Caṇḍa,kālī “socializing with householders and householders’ sons” (*samsaṭṭhā viharati gahapatināpi*

- (3) lusting after the physical form;
- (4) distracted by pleasurable sounds;
- (5) delighting in frivolities with others;
- (6) approving of others indulging in physical pleasures; and
- (7) living the holy life for the sake of going to heaven. (A 7.47/4:54-56), SD 21.9

The reason for his advice is simple enough: such acts easily lead on to the sexual acts; or they easily distract us from the holy life.

There is no compulsion in Buddhism for anyone to keep to the celibacy rule, but we freely choose to do this lifelong as a monastic or for specified durations as a lay practitioner. The Buddhist texts do not promote celibacy because sex is “evil.” Rather, celibacy allows us to focus and direct our energies towards mental cultivation.

Again, Buddhism does not say that sex is evil. In a somewhat humorous vein, the Buddha declares that sex and sensuality are “time-consuming” (*kālika*). In **the Sambhula Sutta** (S 4.21), when Māra (in the form of a venerable brahmin) offers a cryptic advice to a group of young monks insinuating them to enjoy their youth before taking up the spiritual life, they reply in identical words as Samiddhi’s, as recorded in **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), thus:

I [We] have *not* abandoned what is visible right here, avuso, to run after what takes time. I [We] have abandoned what takes time, avuso, to run after what is visible right here.

For, avuso, the Blessed One has declared that sense-pleasures are time-consuming, full of suffering, full of despair, and great is the danger therein, while this Dharma is *visible right here, immediate, inviting us to come and see, accessible, to be personally known by the wise*.

(S 4.21/1:117 f) = (S 1.20.5/1:9), SD 21.4

The point of this teaching is that the body can be freed from the bonds from sexual and sensual bonds in this life itself: through the Dharma, we are capable of awakening in this life itself. As lay practitioners, we can, through the consistent perception of impermanence,¹⁵ attain streamwinning, or as renunciants, we can work towards non-return or arhathood.¹⁶ [5.2.4]

1.4 THE THREE TRAININGS. One of the simplest models of the Buddhist pilgrim’s progress is that of the three trainings (*ti,sikkhā*), that is,

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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| (1) the training in moral virtue | <i>sīla,sikkhā</i> | restraint of body and speech; |
| (2) the training in concentration | <i>samādhi,sikkhā</i> | cultivation of the mind; and |
| (3) the training in wisdom | <i>paññā,sikkhā</i> | the removal of wrong views. |

For the laity, **the training in moral virtue** entails the keeping of the 5 precepts and of sense-restraint. This is the training of our body and speech so that we have a wholesome social or *external* environment. The training begins here, that is, it forms the foundation practice and pervades the other two training. We become more accomplished in moral virtue as we progress up the rungs of the three trainings.

The idea of calming the body and speech is *generally* for sake of a harmonious social life—to be able live happily and productively with others—but, more *specifically*, it is as a preparation for the calming of the mind, so that it can come into clear focus, replete with profound bliss and insight. The centred mind,

gahapati,puttena pi, V 4:293); the female probationer Caṇḍa,kālī who lived “in close proximity with men and youths” (*purisa,samsaṭṭha kumāraka,samsaṭṭha*) who were violent (V 4:333); monks should carry out an act of censure (*tajjanīya,kamma*) against monastics living “in the company of householders” (*gihi,samsaṭṭha*, Cv 1.4.1 = V 2:4). VA says that they were “mixed up” (*missī,bhūtā*) with the world: in terms of *the body*, they were pounding and cooking for householders, perfuming and adorning themselves, using garlands and chains; in terms of *speech*, they were acting as go-between, running errands (VA 915). Comy gives 5 kinds of socializing (*samsagga*): through hearing, seeing, conversing, eating with someone, and bodily contact (MA 2:143). For an example of a monk who is above such socializing, ie Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta, see **Ratha,vinīta S** (M 24.2/1:145 f), SD 28.3.

¹⁵ See **Entering the Stream**, SD 3.3.

¹⁶ See further **Sexuality**, SD 31.7.

as such, is the basis for wisdom, here meaning the removal of wrong views, the cultivation of right views, and ultimately the transcending of all views.

Again here we see the natural role of the body in spiritual training. Personal development must begin with the body, the grossest, most palpable, level of our being. It is also the easiest level of our spiritual training, but a necessary one. For, when the body is undeveloped (*abhavita, kāya*), it is difficult for the mind to develop, too.

Here, “body” (*kāya*) does not refer merely to its *physical* state, but its actions and speech—in other words, what the body *does*. The explanation of *abhavita, kāya* and its positive opposite, *bhavita, kāya* (“developed body”), are found in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), where Saccaka initially identifies *kāya, bhāvanā* (“development of body”) as “self-mortification.”¹⁷ The Commentary says that the Buddha takes “development of body” to mean “cultivation of insight” (*vipassanā bhāvanā*) and “development of mind” to be “cultivation of calmness” (*samatha bhāvanā*) (MA 2:285).

This explanation is rather forced, understandably reflecting the scholastic view of the Mahā, vihāra of mediaeval Sri Lanka. From the Sutta context, it is clear and simple enough to take the term for what it is: a cultivated body, that is, a body that is restrained in the senses, and one that easily gets into a meditative posture leading to some level of samadhi, even dhyana. Let us examine further how this happens.

1.5 THREE KINDS OF SOLITUDE

1.5.1 The 3 solitudes are often mentioned in the Commentaries¹⁸ as follows:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| (1) solitude of the body | (<i>kāya viveka</i>), | that is, physical solitude, |
| (2) solitude of the mind | (<i>citta viveka</i>), | that is, mental solitude, and |
| (3) solitude from the substrates | (<i>upadhi viveka</i>), | or spiritual solitude, that is, nirvana. |

Briefly, the “solitude of the body” is keeping aloof from socializing for the purpose of mental cultivation. The “solitude of the mind” is the letting go of mental defilements, especially in a mindful state. And the “solitude from the substrates” is the abandoning of all unwholesome states, that is, the attainment of awakening. They are explained in detail in **the Mahā Niddesa** (Nm 27).¹⁹

1.5.2 The 3 trainings²⁰ can also be understood as the gradual upgrading of our solitude. No matter how sociable a being we may be, in due course we need to spend time with ourselves alone. We can never really be alone with the world; for, the world as society is always overwhelming us with its ways, and expects us to fall into and follow its rut, that is, to flow with the world.

But the Buddha’s teaching is essentially “against the current” (*paṭisota, gāmi*), against the flow of the world.²¹ The Buddha is *with* the world, but not *of* the world: only when we are out of the quicksand or quagmire, could we safely pull others out of it.²² To get out of the world’s drowning currents, we need to be alone with ourselves, examining ourselves, especially by reviewing the foolishness of our actions, and how they could be wiser. This is called personal or bodily solitude (*kāya, viveka*).

1.5.2 When the body well enjoys its own solitude, it deepens into mental solitude (*citta, viveka*), that is, the mind that is totally free from the hindrances, so that it can easily focus and unify. In the suttas, the two kinds of solitude—that of the body and of the mind—specifically apply to the process of attaining the first dhyana, where, in **the Sāmañña, phala Sutta** (D 2), for example, we have this stock passage:

67 PHYSICAL SOLITUDE. Possessing this aggregate of noble moral virtue, this aggregate of noble sense-restraint, this aggregate of noble mindfulness and full awareness, and this aggregate of noble contentment, he resorts to a secluded dwelling: a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a gully [gorge], a hillside cave, a cemetery, a remote forest [jungle grove], the open air, a heap of straw.²³

¹⁷ M 36.4/1:237 @ SD 49.4; see also **Loṇa, phala S** (A 3.99), SD 3.6 (2).

¹⁸ Nm 27, 140, 157, 341; DA 169; MA 2:142; UA 163, 206, 231, 396; SA 3:122; DhA 2:103, 3:129.

¹⁹ See *Viveka, nissita*, SD 20.4 (4.3) & UA:M 667 n263.

²⁰ See *Sīla samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6.

²¹ S 1:136 ; A 2:6, 214 f.

²² Cf Dh 327; Sn 535, 845, 945, 1145..

²³ *So iminā ca ariyena sīla-k, khandhena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena indriya, saṁvarena samannāgato iminā ca*

Returning from his almsround, after his meal, he sits down, crosses his legs, keeps his body erect, and establishes mindfulness before him.

68 MENTAL SOLITUDE. (1) Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with a mind devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness.

(2) Abandoning ill will and anger, he dwells with a mind devoid of ill will, sympathetic with the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will and anger.

(3) Abandoning sloth and torpor, he dwells with a mind devoid of sloth and torpor, mindful, alert, perceiving light. He cleanses his mind of sloth and torpor.

(4) Abandoning restlessness and remorse, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness and remorse.

(5) Abandoning spiritual doubt, he dwells having crossed over doubt, with no perplexity with regard to wholesome mental states. He cleanses his mind of doubt. (D 2,67-68/1:71), SD 8.10

1.5.3 The third solitude—the **solitude from the substrates**—refers to the letting go of and freedom from the 5 aggregates, sensual desire, mental defilements, and karma, collectively known as “the substrates” (*upadhi*), the essentials of life or substratum of existence, or simply, the fuel of life. It is often mentioned in the suttas, especially in the older sections.²⁴ The phrase “the abandoning of all substrates” (*sabb’upadhi paṭinissagga*) refers to nirvana.²⁵

2 Understanding the body

2.1 RECOLLECTION OF THE BODY

2.1.1 The basic level of Buddhist training can be said to comprise of *knowing the body, taming it, and freeing it*. A well known Buddhist model, known as the “basic *satipaṭṭhāna* formula,” as given in the **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 12; M 10) defines the *first* of the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) as follows:

Here, bhikshus, a monk²⁶ dwells²⁷ exertive, clearly aware, mindful, **observing [watching] the body in the body**, removing covetousness and displeasure²⁸ in the world.

(D 22,1.3/2:290) = (M 10,3/1:56) & SD 13.1

2.1.2 The same is then said of (2) feelings, (3) the mind, and (4) dharmas (phenomena). The basic instruction of the 4 focuses is that the beginner should start by observing “**the body in the body**,” and then build up his practice of the other three as and when the occasion arises. The full set of the 4 focuses of mindfulness are as follows:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| (1) observing “the body in the body,” | <i>kāye kāyānupassī</i> |
| (2) observing “feelings in the feelings,” | <i>vedanāsu vedanā’nupassī</i> |

ariyena sati,sampajaññena samannāgato imāya ca ariyāya santuḥhitāya samannāgato vivittam senāsanam bhajati, araññam rukkha,mūlam pabbatam kandaram giri,guham susānam vana,pattham abbhokāsam palāla,puñjam. This stock phrase of 9 places conducive to meditation are found at D 1:72, 207, 2:242, 3:49; M 1:181, 269, 274, 346, 440, 441, 2:162, 226, 3:3, 35, 115-117; A 2:210, 3:92, 100, 4:436, 5:207; Nm 1:26, 140, 2:341; Miln 369. A shorter list of 3 places, probably later, is mentioned in **Anāpāna,sati S** (M 118): “Here, monks, a monk who has gone to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, establishes mindfulness before him.” (M 118,17/3:82).

²⁴ Sn 33c, 33d || 364a, 34c, 374c546a = 572a, 728ce = 1051ac.

²⁵ Occurrences of *upadhi* in the Nikāyas: **D** 2:36, 37; **M** 1:136, 137, 168, 436, 2:93, 245; **S** 3:133, 134, 136, 5:226 (×2); **A** 1:133, 2:118, 3:164, 4:423 (×2), 424, 425, 426 (×2), 5:8, 110, 111, 319, 320, 322, 354, 356, 357, 358.

²⁶ Here “a monk” (*bhikkhu*) may refer to either an ordained monastic or anyone who is meditating (here, doing *satipaṭṭhāna*) (DA 3:756; VbhA 216 f; cf SnA 251). See **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.1 (3.1a).

²⁷ *Ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā,domanassam.* In the foll phrase, we find 4 of the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriya*) in action: see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 12; M 10), SD 13.1 (4.2).

²⁸ “Covetousness and displeasure,” *abhijjhā,domanassam*, which here is a short-hand for the 5 hindrances (sense-desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt). See **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.1 (4.2).

- (3) observing “the mind in the mind,” and *citte cittānupassī*
 (4) observing “dharma in the dharma.” *dhamme dhammānupassī*

For our purpose here, we shall focus only on the first statement, and comment on the other three only in passing.²⁹

2.1.3 The Majjhima Commentary explains that such a repetition has the purpose of precisely determining the object of contemplation and of isolating that object from others with which it might be confused (MA 1:241 f). In each case, the object should be observed simply as a body, and not as a man, a woman, a self or a living being. The vital purpose behind this approach is so that they are *not* seen as

- “This is mine” (*etam mama*) which arises through craving (*taṇhā*), or
- “This I am” (*eso ’ham asmi*) due to conceit (*māna*), or
- “This is my self” (*eso me attā*) due to wrong view (*diṭṭhi*).³⁰

These three are also known as “latent tendencies to ‘I’-making, ‘mine’-making and conceit” (*ahañ, kāra, mamañ, kāra, mānānusaya*).³¹ They are called **the 3 obsessions** (*gāha*) and are the main factors behind conception (M 1) and mental proliferation (M 18). In short, the satipatthana experiences are not “beliefs” but direct experiences of reality.³²

2.1.4 The word “**body**” (*kāya*) here has two senses:

- (a) the breath is a “body” because it is a physical process, that is, a dynamic cycle that goes through the cycle of arising and passing away;
- (b) it is a “body” in a generic collective sense, simply meaning “group.”³³ [2.1.6]

2.1.5 Furthermore, **form** as the “great elements” (*mahā, bhūta*) [3.3] comprises 25 kinds of **derived forms** (*upādā, rūpa*), namely,³⁴

The five sense faculties (*pasāda, rūpa*): seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, body; the 4 sense-objects: form, sound, smell, taste (touch being identical with three of the great elements, namely, earth, fire and air);

femininity	(<i>itth ’indriya</i>);
masculinity	(<i>puris ’indriya</i>);
physical base of the mind	(<i>hadaya, vatthu</i>); ³⁵
bodily intimation	(<i>kāya, viññatti</i>),
verbal intimation	(<i>vacī, viññatti</i>);
physical life	(<i>rūpa, jīvitā</i>);
the space element	(<i>ākāsa, dhātu</i>),
physical agility	(<i>rupassa lahutā</i>),

²⁹ See **Satipatthāna Ss** (D 22/2:290-315), SD 13.2 & (M 10/1:55-63), SD 13.3; & SD 13.1 (3).

³⁰ **Anattā, lakkhaṇa S** (S 3:28/4:19 f), SD 1.3.

³¹ M 22.15, 72.15, 112.11 20, S 2:75, 3:236, 4:41, A 1:132, 133.

³² See Bodhi, *The Discourse on the Root of Existence*, 1980:8-11; Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

³³ On the mind-moment, see **Raho, gata S** (S 36.11), SD 33.6 Streamwinner(1.4).

³⁴ See (**Upādāna**) **Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56.7/3:59), SD 3.7 n. Although the “derived forms” (*upādā, rūpa*, later Pali *upādāya, rūpa*) are mentioned here, their analysis first appears in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (Dhs 596; Tkp 3, qu at Vism 535; Tkp 89, 109; Vism 444), **The Abhidhammattha, saṅgaha** lists 28 “material phenomena” by adding the 4 great elements (earth, water, fire, air) to the head of the list. See BDict: Khandha & also *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Abhs:BRS 6.2-5). For a useful discussion, see Harvey 1993:3-5 (digital ed); also Karunadasa 1967:38 f & Boisvert 1995:37-42.

³⁵ *Hadaya, vatthu*, lit “the heart as physical basis” of the mind. This is a late concept. BDict (sv): “The heart according to the commentaries, as well as to the general Buddhist tradition, forms the physical base (*vatthu*) of consciousness. In the canonical texts, however, even in the Abhidhamma-Piṭaka, no such base is ever localized, a fact which seems to have first been discovered by Shwe Zan Oung (*Compendium of Philosophy*, p277 ff). In the Patthāna, we find repeatedly only the passage: ‘That material thing based on which mind-element and mind-consciousness element function’ (*yaṃ rūpaṃ nissāya mano, dhātu ca mano, viññāna, dhātu ca vattanti, taṃ rūpaṃ*).” See [3.2] below.

physical elasticity	(<i>rūpassa mudutā</i>),
physical adaptability	(<i>rūpassa kammaññatā</i>),
physical growth	(<i>rūpassa upacaya</i>);
physical continuity	(<i>rūpassa santati</i>); and
food	(<i>āhāra</i>).

These 24 kinds of form are called the physical body (*rūpa, kāya*) in contrast to the mental body (*nāma, -kāya*).

2.1.6 Of these, the breathing process is “a certain body” because it is included in tangible object (“touch”) base (*phoṭṭabb’āyatana*) [2.1.4]. For this reason, it is said that we observe a body of air (*vāyo, -kāya*), that is, motion or pressure, among the 4 bodies (the 4 great elements), or we see breath as a body among the 25 kinds of form which are the physical body (*rūpa, kāya*). Therefore, we observe and see body in the body.³⁶

2.2 WORKING WITH THE BODY. From practising the recollection of the body, we will notice that we neither “have” a body, nor do we “occupy” it. This is obvious from the range of mindfulness exercises that comprise the “recollection of the body” (*kāyānupassanā*), namely,

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (1) the mindfulness of breath ³⁷ | <i>ānāpāna, sati</i> ; | |
| (2) the 4 postures ³⁸ | <i>iriya, patha</i> ; | |
| (3) full awareness ³⁹ | <i>sampajañña</i> ; | |
| (4) the perception of the foul ⁴⁰ | <i>asubha, saññā</i> ; | the 31 parts of the body [2.4]; |
| (5) the analysis of the elements ⁴¹ | <i>dhātu, vavatthāna</i> ; | and |
| (6) the nine charnel-ground meditation | <i>sīvathikā</i> . | |

What does it mean when we say that our body does not exist in itself? It means that we consist of physical processes and mental processes that work interdependently, like two sheaves of reeds leaning on one another, as **the Mahā Nidāna Sutta** (M 12) and **the Nala, kalapiya Sutta** (S 12.67) say.⁴² And they are not just mind-body processes, but that is our locus of transformation, too. We can grow spiritually and liberate ourselves right where we are. Indeed where else can our liberation come from?⁴³

The Buddhist teachings present a wide range of meditation methods that focus on the body, as shown above. Many meditation methods involve *sustained awareness of everyday activity*, such as the mindful-

³⁶ Based on notes in email from Nina van Gorkom. See S:B 1916 n124.

³⁷ On breath meditation, see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62), SD 3.11 esp Streamwinner(2). Here (and at D 22.20) breath meditation is a 4-step exercise; as 16-step exercise in **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118/3:78-88); as a perception (*saññā*) at **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60.12-13/5:111 f); and as a “concentration of breath mindfulness” (*ānāpāna, -sati, samādhi*) in **Ānāpāna Saṃyutta** (eg S 5:317).

³⁸ For an expanded version of this exercise, see **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122.11/3:122 f), SD 11.4. Except for highlighting the 4 postures, this exercise of this section is actually found in the “Full awareness” section which follows and which, in **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2), is called “mindfulness and full awareness” (*sati sampajañña*) (D 2.65).

³⁹ “Full awareness,” *sampajañña* or *sampajāna*. See SD 13.1 (3.6abc). See n on “The 4 postures” [3].

⁴⁰ In the Suttas, this practice is called *asubha, saññā* (also: “perception of impurity”). The term *asubha, nimitta* (the sign of impurity/foulness) in Comys, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f) (called “cemetery meditation,” *sīvathikā*, here). For details of practice, see **Kāya, gatā, sati S** (M 119), SD 12.21 SD 13.1 (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

⁴¹ Vism 348 says that the 4 primary elements are only briefly explained in the Satipatthāna Ss (D 22; M10), but at length in **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28.6-27/1185-191, SD 6.16), **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.8-17/1:421-426 @ SD 3.11) and **Dhātu, vibhaṅga S** (M 140.13-18/3:240-242 @ SD 4.17). The 4 elements are explained in some detail in **Mūla, pariyāya S** (M 1). See **Rūpa, SD 17.2**.

⁴² Respectively, M 12.21-22/2:63 & S 12.67/2:114; see S:B 48.

⁴³ See Dh 160.

ness of breathing, mindfulness of our postures (standing, walking, sitting, reclining), and of routine activities (eating, drinking, talking, doing nothing, dressing, working, doing our toilet, etc).⁴⁴

Other meditations are *analytic* in nature. In the elements meditation, for example, the body is reflected as being composed of earth (solid and “resistant” aspects), water (liquid or cohesive aspects), fire (heat or decay), wind (motion, breath, peristalsis, etc), and space (internal cavities and spaces), and their external counterparts.⁴⁵ Such practices are helpful for overcoming the illusion of an enduring self or soul.

Such meditations calm and clear the meditator’s mind so as to be able to see the dynamics of the mind-body interaction. **The Roga Sutta** (A 4.157.1), for example, states that there are two kinds of illnesses, physical and mental. We may be free from physical illness indefinitely, but there is always some level of mental illness in the unawakened that is, the working of greed, hate and delusion.⁴⁶

This teaching of the two illnesses is closely related to **the Nakula, pitā Sutta** (S 22.1), where the Buddha advises the aged layman Nakula, pitā to reflect, “My body may be sick but my mind will not be sick.”⁴⁷ It pays to labour on this vital point. Happiness is not always pleasure: pain is not always suffering. Pain is the way the body or the mind is telling us that it is uncomfortable or hurt. Unhappiness (or any other negative emotion) is a position we choose to take, reacting to the pain. The point of this saying is that we can choose *not* to react negatively, and looks at the situation for what it really is.

Textually, the point here is that the body, being physical, is subject to the vicissitudes of life, as stated in **the Sāmañña, phala Sutta** (D 2):

“This body of mine is form composed of the 4 great elements,⁴⁸ born from mother and father, nourished with rice and porridge, subject to inconstancy, rubbing, pressing, dissolution, and dispersion.⁴⁹ And this consciousness of mine lies attached here, bound up here.”⁵⁰

(D 2,85/1:76), SD 8.10

The full significance of such knowledge becomes clear as a result of a fully concentrated mind. The meditator, it is said, “with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects,⁵¹ pliant, malleable, steady and utterly unshakable, he directs and inclines it” to this knowledge and vision (id).

2.3 SEEING THE BODY AS IT IS. When we are keeping up with our meditation practice, it is sufficient that we reflect on *the impermanence of the body* to maintain some level of insight into its true nature, so that we are not deluded into taking the body as more than what it really is. However, when we are overwhelmed with lust, meaning a strong attraction to the body, then there are two helpful meditations, that is, those on the 31 parts of the body and on the stages of bodily decomposition.

In the Suttas, meditation on the 31 parts of the body is called the “perception of the foul” (*asubha, saññā*),⁵² and the second meditation is known as the “nine charnel-ground meditations” (*sīvāthikā*),⁵³ or the *nine* stages in the decomposition of the human body. In the Commentaries, however, *asubha, nimitta*

⁴⁴ See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10/1:55-63), SD 13.3.

⁴⁵ See **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.8/1:421 f), SD 3.11.

⁴⁶ A 4:157.1/2:142 f @ SD 5.4 Streamwinner(5).

⁴⁷ S 22.1/3:1-5 @ SD 5.4.

⁴⁸ The 4 great (or primary): earth (*mahā, bhūtā*), water, fire, wind (D 1:214; Vism 11.27; Abhs 154): see **Rūpa, SD** 17.2a.

⁴⁹ See **Vammika S** (M 23.4/1:144) for parable of the anthill (representing the body).

⁵⁰ This statement means that consciousness here (in a physical being) is dependent on the physical body. RD points out that this and other passages disprove the idea that the consciousness (*viññāṇa*) transmigrates. For holding such a view, Sāti was severely rebuked by the Buddha (M 38). A new re-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi*) arises at conception, dependent on the old one (see Vism 17.164 ff).

⁵¹ *Upakkilesa*: to be distinguished from *kilesa*, “defilement.” Perhaps the 10 “imperfections of insight” listed in Vism 20.105-130/633-638 are meant here, but potential hindrances at a certain stage of insight meditation. (Walshe)

⁵² On details of practice, see **Kāya, gatā, sati S** (M 119), SD 12.21 Streamwinner(5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

⁵³ On *sivāthikā*, see V 3:36; D 2:295 f; A 3:268, 323; J 1:146; Pv 3.5.2.

(the sign of the foul) refers to one or other of the ten foul objects, that is, the *ten* stages of human decomposition.⁵⁴

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (M 10) graphically describes the nine stages of bodily decomposition or “cemetery meditation” (*sīvathikā*) for the purpose of meditation, in the following manner:

(1) Furthermore, bhikshus, just as if⁵⁵ he were to see bodily remains [a corpse]⁵⁶ thrown aside in a charnel-ground,

one, two, three days dead, bloated, livid [discoloured], festering,⁵⁷

—so, too, he compares⁵⁸ this very body with that, thinking:

“Such is the nature of this body: it will become like that—this is unavoidable.”⁵⁹

THE SATIPATTHANA REFRAIN. So he dwells observing the body in the body internally, or, observing the body in the body externally,

or, observing the body in the body both internally and externally;

or, he dwells observing states that arise in the body,

or, he dwells observing states that pass away in the body,

or, he dwells observing states that arise and pass away in the body.

Or else, he maintains the mindfulness that “There is a body,” merely for knowing and awareness.

And he dwells independent, not clinging to anything in this world.

And that, bhikshus, is how a monk dwells observing the body in the body.

(2) Or, again, bhikshus, just as if he were to see bodily remains [a corpse] thrown aside in a charnel-ground,

being eaten by crows,

or being eaten by hawks,

or being eaten by vultures,

⁵⁴ **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.14-31/1:58 f), SD 13.3; Vism 6.1-11/178 f.

⁵⁵ “Just as if,” *seyyathā pi*, alt tr “as though.” [14, 17, 26] “The phrase ‘as though’ (*seyyathā pi*) suggests this meditation, and those to follow, need not be based upon an actual encounter with bodily remains in the state of decay described, but can be performed as an imaginative exercise” (M:ÑB 1192 n150). **The Visuddhi,magga** details how a meditator can gain the first vision of a decaying corpse in a charnel ground and subsequently develop this vision while meditating in his dwelling Vism 6.12-69/180-190, esp §§6.62-64). **Ledi Sayadaw** says that this meditation could be done based on sick or wounded persons (incl oneself), or with dead animals as the object (TM nd:58). See also Analayo 2003:152-155.

⁵⁶ “Bodily remains,” *sarīra*, or “the remains of a body.” The word *sarīra* (Skt *śarīra*) has two broad meanings: (1) the body (living or dead); (2) bodily remains (both bones or relics). The *Pali-English Dictionary* gives all these senses: (1) **The (physical) body** (D 1:157; M 1:157; S 4:286; A 1:50, 2:41, 3:57 f, 323 f, 4:190; Sn 478, 584; Dh 151; Nm 181; J 1:394 (six blemishes), 2:31, 3:53 (~*maṃsa*, flesh of the body) ; *antima,sarīra*, one who wears his last body, an *anāgāmi* (Sn 624; S 1:210; Dh 400). (2) **A dead body, a corpse** (D 2:141, 164, 295 f; M 1:58, 3:91): this is the sense used here in the Satipaṭṭhāna Ss. (3) **The bones** (D 2:164, 296; M1:58 f). (4) **Relics** (Vv 63, 32; VvA 269). In later works, the suffix *-dhātu* is added, ie *sarīrika,dhātu*, to denote “relics (of the Buddha)” (VvA 165, 269; Mahv 13, 167). In **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16 @ SD 9), the word *sarīra* is used in a all these different ways. See SD 9 §7d(1).

⁵⁷ Cf (**Cattāro**) **Padhāna S** (D 33.1.11(10)/3:225 = A 4.14/2:16 f) which says, “Here, bhikshus, a monk guards the auspicious sign of samadhi when it has arisen, that is to say, the perception [image] of a skeleton (*aṭṭhikāṃ,saññāṃ*), the perception of the worm-infested (corpse) (*puḷavaka,saññāṃ*), the perception of the discoloured (corpse) (*vinīlaka,saññāṃ*), the perception of the festering (corpse) (*vipubbaka,saññāṃ*), the perception of the fissured (corpse) (*vicchidaka,saññāṃ*), the perception of the bloated (corpse). (*uddhumataka,saññāṃ*). This simpler Aṅgutara listing is probably older than the more systematized set of Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S.

⁵⁸ “He compares,” *upasaṃharati*, see Intro (3.9b).

⁵⁹ Notice the impersonal tone of the statement, reflecting the lack of ownership and not self, ie, the body is actually beyond one’s control [14, 16, 24, 30]. This is an application of the “specific conditionality” (*idap-paccayatā*). See Intro 3.7c & SD 5.16(2).

or being eaten by dogs,
or being eaten by jackals,
or being eaten by various worms and bugs;

—so, too, he compares this very body with that, thinking:

“Such is the nature of this body: it will become like that—this is unavoidable.”

[The satipatthana refrain here.]

Or, again, bhikshus, just as if he were to see bodily remains [bones] thrown aside in a charnel-ground,

(3) a skeleton with flesh and blood, connected by sinews,

(4) a skeleton, fleshless, smeared with blood, connected by sinews,

(5) a skeleton, flesh and blood all gone, connected by sinews,

(6) random disconnected bones, scattered in all directions, a hand-bone here, a foot-bone there, a shin-bone here, a rib there, a thigh-bone here, [D 2:297] a pelvic bone there, a back-bone here, a shoulder-bone there, a neck-bone here, a jaw-bone there, a tooth here, a skull there;

—so, too, he compares this very body with that:

“Such is the nature of this body: it will become like that—this is unavoidable.”

[The satipatthana refrain.]

Or, again, bhikshus, just as if he were to see bodily remains thrown aside in a charnel-ground,

(7) the bones bleached, looking like conch-shells,

(8) the bones piled up, over a year old,

(9) the bones reduced to dust;

—so, too, he compares this very body with that:

“Such is the nature of this body: it will become like that—this is unavoidable.”

[The satipatthana refrain here.]

(M 10,14-31/1:58 f, abridged), SD 13.3

This is powerful medicine, and is not meant as a regular meditation. The meditator must consult his meditation teacher over the need, extent, duration and rules regarding this meditation, and practise it under his guidance. The meditator is generally advised to balance this practice with lovingkindness so that he does not instead hate the body or himself.

2.4 MORE WAYS OF OVERCOMING LUST FOR THE BODY. It is rare that any practitioner, whether monastic or lay, would today practise the meditation on the stages of bodily decomposition, unless he has access to such a cadaver [2.3]. Even then, there are other meditations that, properly done, could have a similar effect of overcoming lust for the body. A very good example of such teachings is found in **the Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Sutta** (S 35.127), where the rajah Udena approaches the monk Piṇḍola and asks him how is it “that these young monks, black-haired youths, endowed and blessed with youth, in the prime of life, who have still not fully enjoyed sense-pleasures,⁶⁰ live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so?”

Piṇḍola answers by saying that the Buddha admonishes his monks to conduct themselves towards women in an age-appropriate manner, that is, to regard older women as “mothers,” those around their age as “sisters,” and those younger as “daughters.” The rajah then retorts that lust respect no age, and one could be attracted to women of any age. The ensuing dialogue is as follows:

6 THE PERCEPTION OF THE FOUL (*asubha,saññā*). “Maharajah, this was said by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one,

‘Come now, monks, review this very body, wrapped in skin and full of various impurities, from the soles of the feet upwards and from the crown of the head downwards, thus:⁶¹

“In this body there are⁶²

⁶⁰ *anikīṭitāvino* (pl, S 1:117,25 = 118,14 = 4:110,27 = 111,4), from *na-nikīṭitāvi(n)* (mf) [cf vl S I 9,6: *a-nikkīṭ°*], “who has not finished playing,” ie one who has not yet enjoyed (sensual pleasures) in full; S 1:9,6 (*pathamena vayasā ~ī kāmesu*); *kāmesu akīṭita-kīṭo abhuttāvī akatakāmakīṭo*, SA [so E^c C^c; S^c °*kāmakāro*] = 10,20.

⁶¹ In the Suttas, this practice is called *asubha,saññā* (perception of impurity): see [2.2(2)] above.

- (1) head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin;⁶³
- (2) flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys;⁶⁴
- (3) heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs),⁶⁵ spleen, lungs;⁶⁶
- (4) large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents,⁶⁷ faeces[, brain];⁶⁸
- (5) bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat;⁶⁹
- (6) tears, grease, saliva, snot, oil of the joints,⁷⁰ urine.””””⁷¹

7 “That is easy, master Bhāradvāja, for those monks who are developed in body,⁷² developed in moral conduct, developed in mind, developed in wisdom but, it is difficult for those who are undeveloped in body,⁷³ undeveloped in moral conduct, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in wisdom.

But master Bhāradvāja, for those monks who are undeveloped in body, undeveloped in moral conduct, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in wisdom, this is difficult.

Sometimes, though one thinks: “I will regard the body as foul,” one still pays attention to the foul as if it were beautiful.

Is there, master Bhāradvāja, another cause, master Bhāradvāja, that these young monks, black-haired youths, endowed and blessed with youth, in the prime of life, who have still not fully enjoyed sense-pleasures, live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so?”

8 SENSE-RESTRAINT. “Maharajah, this was said by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one,

‘Come, bhikshus, dwell guarding the sense-doors:

- (1) Having seen a form with the eye, do not grasp its signs and features.⁷⁴

Since, if the eye-door is unguarded, evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure would assail you, practise its restraint.

⁶² In this meditation of parts of the body, groups (1)-(4) constitute the earth element (**Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S**, M 62.8/1:421 f); groups (5)-(6) constitute the water element (M 62.9/1:422). The same sutta describes the fire element as *that by which one is warmed, ages, and burns, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed and tasted gets completely digested*, or whatever else that is liquid, liquefied and clung to internally and individually [belonging to oneself] (M 62.10/1:422); and the wind element as *up-going winds [burping], down-going winds, winds in the belly [flatulence], winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath*, or whatever else that is air, airy and clung to internally and individually [belonging to oneself] (M 62.11/1:422 f).

⁶³ *Kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco*. The meditation on these five parts “with skin as the fifth” or “skin pentad” (*taca*,-*pancake kamma-ṭ,ṭhāna*) (Vism 242=8.50) forms the basic spiritual practice first taught to monks at the end of ordination.

⁶⁴ *Māmsaṃ nahāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhi, miñjā vakkam*.

⁶⁵ “Membranes,” alt tr “pleura,” *kilomaka*, ie a pair of membranous sacs surrounding the lungs.

⁶⁶ *Hadayaṃ yakanāṃ kilomakaṃ pihakaṃ papphāsaṃ*.

⁶⁷ *Udariyaṃ*, lit “that which is in the *udara* (stomach),” sometimes tr as “gorge” (Vism:Ñ 8.120/-122/258 f); technically, this includes chyme (food half-digested by gastric juices, expelled into the duodenum).

⁶⁸ *Antaṃ anta, guṇaṃ udariyaṃ karisaṃ*. See M 3:90; KhpA 38. Later traditions add the 32nd part—*matthake mattha, luṅgaṃ* (lit “the brain in the head”) (Kh 3, Pm 1:6 f; Vism 8.42-144/239-266): the “brain” is not listed at S 4:-111). Although “brain” is usually listed last, Comys list it as no 20, after “faeces” (KhA 60; Vism 8.126/260) in the set headed by “large intestines” since they have similar or related appearances. For a fascinating discussion on how ancient ascetics obtain such knowledge of the human anatomy, see Zysk 1998:34-37. See [3.2] below.

⁶⁹ *Pittaṃ semhaṃ pubbo lohitāṃ sedo medo*.

⁷⁰ *Lasikā*, ie synovial fluid.

⁷¹ *Assu vasā kheḷo siṅghānikā lasikā muttam*. Here there are a total of 31 parts of the body. See here (4)n.

⁷² “Developed in body” (*bhāvita, kāya*) means developed in the “body” of the 5 sense-doors (*bhāvita, pañca, dvārika, kāya*), ie, having sense-restraint: see n on “undeveloped in body,” below here.

⁷³ “Undeveloped in body” (*abhāvita, kāya*) means undeveloped in the “body” of the five sense-doors (*abhāvita, pañca, dvārika, kāya*), ie, lacking in sense-restraint. (SA 2:395)

⁷⁴ For details., see **Nimitta and Anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14.

(2) Having heard a sound with the ear, do not grasp its signs and features.

Since, if the ear-door is unguarded, evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure would assail you, practise its restraint.

(3) Having smelt an odour with the nose, do not grasp its signs and features.

Since, if the nose-door is unguarded, evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure would assail you, practise its restraint.

(4) Having tasted a taste with the tongue, do not grasp its signs and features.

Since, if the tongue-door is unguarded, evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure would assail you, practise its restraint.

(5) Having felt a touch with the body, do not grasp its signs and features.

Since, if the body-door is unguarded, evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure would assail you, practise its restraint.

(6) Having cognized a mental state with the mind, do not grasp the signs and features.

Since, if the mind-door is unguarded, evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure would assail you, practise its restraint.””

(S 35.127/4:111-113), SD 27.6 (2.4)

2.5 SUICIDE: DESTROYING THE BODY. The antithesis to lusting after the body is the desire to destroy it. This is the ultimate hate: self-hate leading to self-destruction. The destruction of the body entails the destruction of life, too. The main Buddhist argument against suicide, especially of one unawakened, is that we will basically return where we left off, and so is caught in a Sisyphu loop.⁷⁵ As it were, the karmic trajectory of each life has to be completed naturally, just as a durian fruit cannot be plucked but must fall from its tree to be harvested and eaten.

2.5.1 The murdered monks. I would like to briefly address three interesting cases of suicide or alleged suicide in early Buddhism. The first case is that of the “murdered monks,” the title used in a related paper by Khantipalo.⁷⁶ This account is found in the Vinaya concerning a group of unnamed monks. It is said that the Buddha, after giving instructions on “the cultivation of the foul” (*asubha, bhāvanā*),⁷⁷ leaves for a two-week solitary retreat.

During that period, the monks who practise the cultivation of the foul soon become disgusted with themselves, and the unawakened ones go to the extent of killing themselves, or have a “sham recluse” (*samaṇa, kuttaka*)⁷⁸ kill them (from which he inherits the dead monks’ worldly possessions). The sham recluse, while washing his bloody knife by the river, becomes remorseful.

It is said that then a certain deity of Māra’s host, “having come over the water without breaking it,”⁷⁹ approaches the sham ascetic, and deludes him into believing that he is doing a good thing, since he was actually “liberating” the monks! The sham monk then continues his killing spree. By the time the Buddha emerges from his retreat, a few hundred monks have been killed.

Then the Buddha, noticing a significant decrease in the order members, made an inquiry. On learning of the sad outcome, he introduces the third Pārajika rule against the taking of life.⁸⁰ Basically the same

⁷⁵ In Greek mythology, the evil king **Sisyphus** is punished by the gods to push a huge boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll down again, and to repeat the task for eternity. The French author, **Albert Camus**, in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), sees Sisyphus as personifying the absurdity of human life, but concludes, “one must imagine Sisyphus happy” as “The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart.” See **Yodh’ājīva S** (S 42.3), SD 23.3 (1).

⁷⁶ See Laurence C R Mills [Khantipalo], “The Case of the Murdered Monks.” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 16, 1992: 71-75.

⁷⁷ Ie meditation on the 32 parts of the body (VA 393 f4; SA 3:265).

⁷⁸ *Samaṇa, kuttaka*, lit “one (merely) dressed as an ascetic (*samaṇa, vesā, dhāraka*),” it is said that merely by shaving his head, putting on a single robe over one shoulder, he is dependent on the monastery (*vihāra*), living as a scrap-eater (*so kira sikhā, mattam thapetvā sīsam muṇḍetvā ekam kāsāvaṃ nivāsetvā ekam amse katvā vihāram yeva upanissāya vighās’āda, bhāvena jīvati*, VA 399).

⁷⁹ *Abhijjamāne udake āgantvā* (V 3:69): see **Miracles**, SD 27.5a

⁸⁰ Pār 3/V 3:68-71.

story without any mention of the murderer (the sham monk) is found in the Saṃyutta.⁸¹ Clearly, the Saṃyutta story is older, and the Vinaya compilers probably borrowed this story and embellished with it with a hired killer. It is also possible that the whole story of the murdered monks is a later invention added into the Pali Canon before it was closed.

Anyway, an interesting point to note is the definition of “human being” (*manussa*) in the Sutta Vibhāṅga or Vinaya’s Old Commentary. “From the first occurrence of consciousness with the first arising of the mind in the mother’s womb, until the time of death, is here called a human” (*yaṃ mātu, kucchimim paṭhamam cittam uppannam paṭhamam viññānam pātubhūtam, yāva maraṇa, kālā etthantare eso manussa, viggaho nāma*) (V 3:73)

2.5.2 Arhats and suicide. There are at least three important discourses that recount the suicides of monks during the Buddha’s time, namely,

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) Channa Sutta | (M 3:263; S 35.87), |
| (2) Godhika Sutta | (S 1:120 f; DhA 1:431 f), |
| (3) Vakkali Sutta | (S 3:119-122), |

The troubling question is whether these monks were arhats when they killed themselves. The Commentaries⁸² take pains to state that Channa was still an ordinary person (*puthujjana*) when he committed suicide but gained liberation just before his death. They tacitly find it inconceivable that an arhat would commit suicide. Keown notes,

why the commentary should take such pains to establish that Channa was not an Arhat... is that the tradition simply found it inconceivable that an Arhat would be capable of suicide... by maintaining that Channa was unenlightened until the very end, the image of the Arhat remains untarnished. (Keown 1996:27)

Indeed, the point seems very clear: why would Channa, or the other two monks, if they were already arhats, kill themselves, since they would have already been liberated then? It is stated in **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) that an arhat is incapable of deliberately harming a living being (including himself).⁸³ Suicide only occurs motivated by a negative emotion—desire, hate, delusion or fear (the 4 biases)—none of which is ever present in an arhat.⁸⁴

2.5.3 Did the Buddha commit suicide? In chapter 3 of **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), the Buddha is said to have renounced his “formations of existence” (*āyu, saṅkhāra*), that is, the remaining of his possible lifespan. Could this be construed as an act of suicide?⁸⁵ The answer is very clear: if arhats are incapable of taking any life or any of the 4 biases (greed, hate, delusion, fear), it is clear that the Buddha, too, is incapable of committing suicide.

Suicide only applies to the unawakened, whose life and death are beyond their control, but they are still under the control of life and death. In the case of the awakened, such as the Buddha and the arhats, they have transcended the plane of life and death of the body as we know it. They have gone beyond duality.

In **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86), the Buddha declares to Anurādha that “when the Tathagata is not being apprehended by you as real and real here in this very life,”⁸⁶ it is not fitting for anyone to describe the Tathagata in terms of the states of truth: as existing, as not existing, as both, or as neither.⁸⁷

⁸¹ S 54.9/5:320-322.

⁸² MA 5:83; SA 2:372.

⁸³ D 33.2.1(10)/3:235.

⁸⁴ D 29.26/3:133. For a study of suicide in early Buddhism, see **Chann’ovāda S** (M 144/3:263-266) & SD 11.12 Intro.

⁸⁵ See **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16), SD 9 Streamwinner(9f) for details.

⁸⁶ Be Ce Ke Se: *Diṭṭh’eva dhamme saccato tathato tathāgate anupalabbhiyamāne*; Ee *Diṭṭh’eva dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabbhiyamāno*. Cf **Alaggadūpama S** (M 22): “And bhikkhus, since in truth and in fact, one can find neither self nor what belongs to a self” (*attani ca bhikkhave attaniye ca saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne*,

3 Body parts

3.1 THE DYNAMICS OF THE BODY. Let us now get back to examining the body of an unawakened being. In the parable of the ant-hill, given in **the Vammika Sutta** (M 23), the Buddha explains that the ant-hill is *our human body*, formed of matter, biologically created, supported by food, and subject to change, pain and death. Although this might suggest purely a physical being⁸⁸—it is really a *being*; this is a body that is endowed with consciousness (*sa,viññāṇaka kāya*).⁸⁹ This body-mind complex is made up of the five aggregate—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.

The human body is often analysed as being composed of the five aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*), that is,

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| (1) form | <i>rūpa;</i> |
| (2) feeling | <i>vedanā;</i> |
| (3) perception | <i>saññā;</i> |
| (4) formations | <i>sankhāra;</i> |
| (5) consciousness | <i>viññāṇa.</i> |

Form is of course the body, further analyzable as either the six sense-bases [4.3] or the 4 elements [3.3]. The six-sense-base model shows how our sense-experiences arises at the body-doors and the mind-door, when each door is linked with its appropriate sense-object and attending consciousness, so that there is sense-impression. This sense-impression induces *feeling* to arise, that is, we *perceive* (recognize) such an experience as being pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, based on our past track record. Once we react to such stimuli with greed, hate or delusion, karma *formations* arise. All this are shaped by our consciousness and in turn shape it, and so we are caught in its rut.⁹⁰

We can prevent bad karma from arising at the sense-doors, that is, train ourselves to break a negative habit or prevent such a habit from arising, by the practice of sense-restraint (*indriya,samvara*). To restrain the senses means that we “do not grasp at its signs and features,” that is, to say, we at once shrink back from an enticing stimulus and refuse to probe it further and be pulled into the maelstrom of sense-desires. In short, we begin by training ourselves to see less, hear less, smell less, taste less, touch less and think less, and then at the right moment, we go on to:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| Look less, | see more; |
| Hear less, | listen more; |
| Smell less, | breathe more; |
| Eat less, | taste more; |
| Touch less, | feel more; |
| Think less, | mind more. ⁹¹ |

This is a basic meditator’s code of living mindfully, supporting the body in a healthy manner, even enjoying every moment of it, and yet neither over-indulging nor missing it when it is over.

The 4-element model, as we shall see [3.3], is another way we can analyse the body with beneficial effects. In **the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62), for example, *five* elements are listed, that is, earth, water, fire, wind, and space. The meditation on the five elements is done in this manner:

M 22.25/1:138,5-6 @ SD 3.13) & “one thus gone, I say, is untraceable even here and now” (*ditṭh’evāham bhikkhave dhamme tathāgatam ananuvejjo ti vadāmi*, M 22.36/1:140,6-7).

⁸⁷ S 22.86/3:119 @ SD 21.13. See also **The person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b (8.1).

⁸⁸ D 2,83+84/1:76 (×2) = M 77,29/2:17; M 109,13/3:18, 112,11+20/3:32+36, 23,4/1:144, 74,9/500; S 18,21/2:252 f, 22,71/3:80 f, 22,84/3:103, 22,91/3:136 f, 35.105/4:83 = A 9.15,2/4:386; S 55.21/5:369 f; **Nigrodha,miga J 12**/-1:146. Cf Divy 180: *śatana,patana,vikiraṇa, vidhvamsanā,dharmatā*. The term invariably appears as *sa.viññāṇaka,kāya* in Comys (MA 4:94, 104; SA 2:214). See **Dīgha,nakha S** (M 74,9/1:500), SD 16.1 tr & nn. Cf [1.3]. On form, see **Rūpa, SD** 17.2a.

⁸⁹ M 3:18, 32, 36; S 2:252 f, 3:80 f, 103, 136 f, 169 f; A 1:132-134, 4:53. The term invariably appears as *sa.viññāṇaka,kāya* in Comys (MA 4:94, 104; SA 2:214). On form, see **Rūpa, SD** 17.2a.

⁹⁰ For a further analysis, see **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56/3:58-61), SD 3.7 (6.1-7).

⁹¹ See **Kummôpama S** (S 35.24), SD 19.17 (4.3).

- (1) Each of the five elements is located and defined in the body (internal element);
- (2) It is identified to be the same as its “external element” counterpart;
- (3) It is seen with right wisdom, thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self”; and
- (4) So we see the element for what it is and is detached towards it.

(M 62,8-12/1:421-423), SD 3.11

There is also a list of six elements, that is, the 4 primary elements, space and consciousness.⁹² Space is what envelopes the 4 elements and pervades them. Consciousness here is of course the mind. These six elements form another model of the conscious human.

In the second part of the practice, having identified the element and understanding its nature, we go on to “disown” it, that is, not to regard it as any kind of permanent entity which forms us or the universe. We understand that the elements themselves are in a constant state of flux. In short, we do not identify without our physical body, regarding it simply as a impermanent, constantly changing, becoming otherwise. [2.1]

The Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta continues with a remarkable teaching, so far found only here, that is, the five element-like meditations. Each of the five elements—earth, water, fire, wind and space—is noted for its strength: earth supports, water washes, fire burns, wind blows, and space fills all things “clean and foul” without the slightest revulsion. We are to cultivate such element-like quality so that “agreeable and disagreeable contacts that have arisen will not overpower the mind and remain.”⁹³

Understanding the six sense-bases and the 4 elements gives us a harmonious insight into the true nature of our body. We see its impermanent and unsatisfactory nature, and looking further, we will see its not-self characteristic [6.1]. And despite all this shortcomings, it is, along with mind, our only vehicle towards awakening.⁹⁴

3.2 BRAIN AS THE 32ND BODY PART. Our body and mind are the vehicle for our awakening. The journey of the body-mind is not an outward one, but an inward one, an exploration of our inner space, as it were. In fact, if you understand the mind, you also understand the body. For, as we have seen thus far, the two are intimately interrelated. Now we come to a very interesting question:

Where is the mind located? This question does not trouble the Buddha, as he sees no need to locating the mind anywhere (the reasons for which we will see later). The mind is definitely not in the brain, certainly not confined to or dominated by the brain as the scientists of our time have understood.⁹⁵ In the well known perception of the foul (*asubha,saññā*) [2.4], for example, the brain is nowhere mentioned. *The brain* was only added in commentarial times, probably for two reasons:

- (1) In the perception of the foul (*asubha,saññā*), the 4th set of body-parts runs “large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents, faeces” (*antaṃ anta,guṇaṃ udariyaṃ karīsaṃ*). Such sets are named after the last item; so this should be the “faeces set” (which is a little awkward!). It sounds better as “the brain set” or “the brain five” (*matthaluṅga pañcaka*). (Vism 8.53/242)
- (2) All the other sets of the foul body parts have *either 5 or 6 items*, except the fourth set, which has only four items; so a fifth was added.
- (3) Following traditional *numerology*, the 31 foul parts (as found in the Suttas) would be inauspicious, as it reflects the 31 planes of existence (samsara). Adding a 32nd gives a good feel to it, with nirvana as the 32nd “state,” that is, the way out of all these foulness and suffering.

3.3 WHERE IS THE MIND?

3.3.1 Unlocalized mind. Buddhism has never regarded the brain or any other organ or body-part as the seat of consciousness, thought, memory, or emotion. As Hamilton notes

⁹² See **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.1 (16)/3: 248), **Cha-b,bisodhana S** (M 112.8/3:31, regarded as not-self), **Bahu,dhātuka S** (M 115.5/3:62), and **Titth’āyatana S** (A 3.61.6/1:175 f @ SD 6.8 n here); see also Dhs 638.

⁹³ M 62.13-17/1:423 f), SD 3.11.

⁹⁴ See **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119.43/3:99), SD 12.21.

⁹⁵ In simple terms, we can say that the brain is more like a computer chipboard, on which some of the computer’s software runs, but the computer needs other parts to function properly. The most important component of the computer is the *user*, which is the consciousness.

Nowhere in the early texts is “mind” in this context equated with the brain, and, in spite of its materialistic understanding of the form-*khandha*, the Theravāda tradition as a whole has not interpreted mind to mean brain. As explained in Chapter Two [“The Indian Context”], in the early texts “mind” seems to refer to the most preliminary stage of filtering and organizing of experiential data according to whether it is seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched or non-sensory (that is, abstract).
(Hamilton 2000:167 n27)

As such, nowhere in the Canon does the Buddha assign any specific seat of the mind or consciousness, as those of the other senses.

Even in **the Vibhaṅga**, in the definition of the mind-element and mind-consciousness-element, the word *hadaya* is used in a purely mental, and not physical, sense (Vism 88 f). The brain (*mattha,luṅga*), moreover, seems to have been added as the thirty-second part of the body in **the Paṭisambhidā,magga** (Pm 1.7). The earliest canonical allusion to the seat of consciousness is found in **the Paṭṭhāna**, even then very obliquely, almost cryptically, and repeatedly mentioned as “that material form based on which mind-element and mind-consciousness element function” (*yaṃ rūpaṃ nissāya mano,dhātu ca mano,viññāṇa,-dhātu ca vattanti, taṃ rūpaṃ*, Paṭ 1.4). There is nowhere any statement or question whether *rūpa* is the heart (*hadaya*) or the brain (*matthaluṅga*).

3.3.2 The cardiac theory. There was a popular cardiac theory of the Buddha’s time, one that was evidently upheld by **the Upaniṣads**, where we find that the breath is associated with “soul,” with death, and with the heart as well. The Buddha must have been aware of this but he does not allude to it. We may have hints such cardiac allusions in the following instances:

- Māra’s daughters declares that should they entice anyone who is not lust-free, “his heart would be cast out...his mind deranged” (*hadayaṃ vā’ssa phaleyya...citta,vikkhepaṃ*) (S 4.25/1:125).
- A deity, showing compassion on Ānanda, who is excessively involved in instructing the laity, inspires samvega, saying, “Having gone out into the thicket, at the foot of a tree, | having placed nirvana in your heart, | meditate...” (*rukka.mūla,gahanam pasakkiya | nibbānam hadayasmiṃ opiya | jhāya...*) (S 9.5/1:199).
- The yaksha Sūci,loma threatens the Buddha, “I will cast out your mind, I will split your heart!” (*cittam vā khipeyya hadayaṃ va phaleyya*) (S 10.3/1:207).

Interestingly, in all such cases, the speaker is neither the Buddha nor a Buddhist; it is spoken by Māra’s daughters, by a deity, and by the yaksha Sūci,loma. They are all mythical figures. The point is that the expression “the heart” here is a common idiom, which is probably pre-Buddhist. The Buddha and the other saints do not seem to make use of such an idiom.

Early in the 20th century, **CAF Rhys Davids** has noted that the word *hadaya* is used figuratively in the sense of “inmost,” “inwardness,” even “thorough.”⁹⁶ As such, we have such expressions as “inner pleasure” (*hadaya,sukha*), “going into the heart of things” (*hadaya’angama*), and “the heart of the teaching” (*dhammassa hadaya*).⁹⁷ However, it was possible that such expressions could have encouraged the scholiasts in coming up with the “heart-base” theory.

Some 800 years later, however, commentators like Buddhaghosa and Anuruddha⁹⁸ theorized that the seat of consciousness is clearly the heart. Buddhaghosa, in his **Visuddhi,magga**, characterizes the heart in terms of a lotus, in relation to both its shape and color.⁹⁹

The term that such scholiasts chose for the mind’s alleged location is the “heart-base” or *hadaya,-vatthu*, which literally means, “the heart as physical basis” of the mind.¹⁰⁰ The Buddhist Dictionary defines it as “the heart according to the commentaries, as well as to the general Buddhist tradition, forms the

⁹⁶ *Buddhist Psychology*, 1914: 34.

⁹⁷ *Buddhist Psychology*, 1914: 278.

⁹⁸ See Abhs:BRS 6.3/239(5).

⁹⁹ “Heart: This is the heart flesh. As to *colour*, it is the colour of the black of a red-lotus petal. As to *shape*, it is the shape of a lotus bud with the outer petals removed and turned upside down; it is smooth outside, and inside it is like the interior of a *kosātaki* (loofah gourd) (Vism 8.111/256).

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion, see Karunadasa 1967: 62-66; Peter Harvey 1993: 33-35; Sugunasiri 1995: 411.

physical base (*vatthu*) of consciousness. In the canonical texts, however, even in the Abhidhamma-Piṭaka, no such base is ever localized.¹⁰¹ **SHJ Sugunasiri** concludes that

No doubt the much more detailed characterization of the heart in the Visuddhimagga speaks to the creative genius of Buddhaghosa that Ñāṇamoli [Vism 497 n26] talks about. But the parallel between the specific characterization of the heart in relation to the lotus and the placing of “the mind-element and the mind-consciousness element” in the blood that is in the hollow of the heart are too close to be dismissed as being merely coincidental or accidental. The inevitable conclusion, then, has to be that the origin of the view of the seat of consciousness as being in the heart is at least partly Upaniṣadic. (Sugunasiri 1995:417)

SHJ Sugunasiri strongly rejects the identification of the heart-base as the seat of consciousness as “a gross misrepresentation of the Buddha,” and concludes, by way of the commonly accepted Buddhist view today, that “the mind is extended throughout the body, through its neuroskeletal system.” (1995:423).

Why does the Buddha not locate the mind anywhere? The obvious simple answer is that there is nowhere that the mind *can* rest. The mind arises dependent of conditions, and those conditions are the six sense-bases, external sense-objects, sense-consciousness, and so on, all working together. For unawakened beings, the mind is clearly restricted to the body, or even a small section of the body. But the mind of one mentally developed, especially a deep meditator, his mind extends well beyond his body. The mind or consciousness of the Buddha or an arhat does not rest anywhere,¹⁰² as we have seen.¹⁰³

3.4 THE MIND OVER THE BODY. The conscious body feels pleasure and pain. It feels both on the physical and mental levels: the body feels and the mind feels, too. However, it is the mind that sees the bodily pains through its own coloured lenses, and weave narratives about them, often replaying them long after the initial stimulus is well over. In other words, most of our pains, if we examine them carefully, results from *how we think* about them.

On a deeper level, we can distinguish three stages of *pain or stress management*, that is, the sensory, the affective and the reflective. Let us look at three important Sutta passage in this connection.

(1) Sensory level. We experience the world through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The first intrusion of pain arises through the physical senses: we saw something; we heard something; we smelt something; or we tasted something. We *recognize* something we like or do not like, depending on what we recall of our past experiences. If we are unable to relate this experience to such as recall, we are likely to ignore it.

In the Suttas, the most famous instruction on sense-restraint is known as the Bāhiya teaching, because it best known (perhaps the oldest) formulation is the teaching given by the Buddha to Bāhiya Dārucīriya, and recorded in **the Bāhiya Sutta** (U 1.10).¹⁰⁴ The same is given to the aged Māluṅkyaputta (when he has given up all his intellectual speculating and decides to go into solitary retreat), as recorded in **the Māluṅkyaputta Sutta** (S 35.95):

Here, Māluṅkyaputta, regarding things¹⁰⁵ seen, heard, sensed¹⁰⁶ and cognized [known] by you:¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ A fact prob first discovered by Shwe Zan Aung (*Compendium of Philosophy*, Abhs:SRD 277 ff).

¹⁰² See **The person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b (5.2).

¹⁰³ On the mind and the brain, see **Meditation & consciousness**, SD 17.8c (7).

¹⁰⁴ **Bāhiya S** (U 1.10/6-8), SD 34.3.

¹⁰⁵ “Regarding things seen, heard, sensed and cognized,” *diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññatabbesu dhammesu*, lit “in things that are to be seen, to be heard, to be sensed, to be cognized.” See foll n.

¹⁰⁶ *Muta*, that is, what is tasted, smelt and touched. See prev n.

¹⁰⁷ This verse is the crux of the sutta and *satipaṭṭhāna*. In Sutta terms, such experiences are not to be seen as “This is mine” (*etam mama*) (which arises through craving, *taṇhā*), or as “This I am” (*eso ‘ham asmi*) (due to conceit, *māna*), or as “This is my self” (*eso me attā*) (due to wrong view, *diṭṭhi*) (**Anattā,lakkhaṇa S**, S 3:68). In short, such experiences are not “beliefs” but direct experiences of reality. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is an

in the seen	there will only be the seen;	
in the heard	there will only be the heard;	
in the sensed	there will only be the sensed;	
in the cognized	there will only be the cognized.	(M 35.95.12/4:73), SD 5.9

This passage is often said today to refer to the practice of “bare attention,” that is, simply (without comment) noting phenomena as they arise and fall away. In other words, this is a practical summary of how to train our attention so that distraction and suffering does not arise.

In Sutta terms, such experiences are not to be seen as “This is mine” (*etam mama*) (which arises through craving, *taṇhā*), or as “This I am” (*eso ‘ham asmi*) (due to conceit, *māna*), or as “This is my self” (*eso me attā*) (due to wrong view, *diṭṭhi*).¹⁰⁸ In short, such experiences are not “beliefs” but direct experiences of reality.¹⁰⁹

In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is an experience of reality (*param’attha*); after it has reached the mind-door and evaluated, it becomes conventional (*paññatti*) reality, that brings one suffering due to greed, hate or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, one would in due course see the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self.

(2) **Affective level.** The **Nākula,piṭā Sutta** (S 22.1) records an important teaching by the Buddha to aged Nakula,piṭā on the two kinds of pain, bodily and mental. On meeting the Buddha, Nakula,piṭā complains that he is too old and frail to visit the monks for instructions, and asks the Buddha to give him an appropriate teaching. The Buddha gives this short but profound line to reflect on:

“My body may be sick but my mind will not be sick.”
(*Ātura,kāyassa me sato cittaṃ anāturaṃ bhavissati.*) (S 22.1.4/3:1), SD 5.4

Sāriputta instructs Nakula,piṭā how “not to own” any of the five aggregates, thus:

Here, householder, the learned noble disciple, who sees the noble ones, skilled in the way of the noble ones, trained in the way of the noble ones, who sees the true individuals and is skilled in the way of the true individual, trained in the way of the true individual,¹¹⁰

—does *not* regard **form** as self, nor self as possessing form, nor form as in self, nor self as in form;

—he does *not* live obsessed by the notions, ‘I am form. Form is mine.’

As he lives *not* obsessed by these notions, that form changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, there do not arise in him, sorrow, lamentation, [physical] pain, [mental] displeasure or despair. (S 22.1.18/3:4), SD 5.4

The same reflection is then done for each of the other four aggregates—feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.¹¹¹

(3) **Reflective level.** When we are better at managing our sense-experiences, we can go on to practise how to really see them *in a detached manner*. The **Dhātu Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 140) gives us here a rare insight into how an arhat responds to feelings:

experience of reality (*param’attha*); after it has reached the mind-door and evaluated, it becomes conventional (*paññatti*) reality, that brings one suffering due to greed, hate or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, one would in due course see the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. See Mahasi Sayadaw, *A Discourse on Malukyaputta Sutta*, tr U Htin Fatt, Rangoon, 1981.

¹⁰⁸ See eg **Anattā,lakkhaṇa S** (S 3:28/4:19 f), SD 1.3.

¹⁰⁹ See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995: 32 f.

¹¹⁰ This whole section is stock, descriptive of the streamwinner, ie one who has destroyed the three lower fetters of self-identity view, doubt and clinging to rituals and vows.

¹¹¹ S 22.1.18-25/3:4 f), SD 5.4.

TRUE NATURE OF FEELING.

If he feels a pleasurable feeling,

he understands that it is impermanent;
 he understands that it is not to be clung to;
 he understands that there is no delight in it.

If he feels a painful feeling,

he understands that it is impermanent;
 he understands that it is not to be clung to;
 he understands that there is no delight in it.

If he feels a neutral feeling,

he understands that it is impermanent;
 he understands that it is not to be clung to;
 he understands that there is no delight in it.

If he feels a pleasurable feeling, he feels it in a detached manner.

If he feels a painful feeling, he feels it in a detached manner.

If he feels a neutral feeling, he feels it in a detached manner.

When he feels a feeling ending with the body, he understands, “I feel a feeling ending with the body.”

When he feels a feeling ending with life, he understands, “I feel a feeling ending with life.”

He understands, “When the body has broken up after life has ended, all that is felt, in which he delights not, will cool down right here.”

ANALOGY OF THE OIL-LAMP. Bhikshu, just as an oil-lamp burns on account of oil and wick, and when oil and wick are used up, if it does not get any more fuel, it is extinguished from lack of fuel; even so, when he feels a feeling ending with the body, he understands, “I feel a feeling ending with the body.”

When he feels a feeling ending with life, he understands, “I feel a feeling ending with life.”

He understands, “When the body has broken up after life has ended, all that is felt, in which he delights not, will cool down right here.”

25 Therefore, such an accomplished bhikshu is one accomplished in **the supreme foundation of wisdom**. For this, bhikshu, is the supreme noble wisdom, that is to say, the knowledge of the ending of all suffering.¹¹² (M 140.24-25/2:244 f), SD 4.17

The practice of **self-watching**, described above, begins with begin aware a sense-experience as they arise, taking them for what they really are (a visible form as a visible form, free from narrative; a sound as a sound, free from narrative, etc). This is best done as a meditation practice so that we get used to it. Then, we go on to examine the arising and nature of feeling, again taking them for what they are, and not reading anything into them. And finally, we regard our sense-experiences (including our thoughts) in a detached manner, that is, not owning them, but simply seeing their arising and passing away. This is beautifully put in this famous passage:

[This body is form made up of the 4 primary elements,¹¹³ born from mother and father, built up on rice and porridge, subject to impermanence, rubbing, pressing, breaking up, and crumbling. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Comy: The knowledge of the ending of all suffering is the wisdom of the fruit of arhathood (MA 5:59).

¹¹³ The 4 great (or primary) elements: earth (*mahā, bhūtā*), water, fire, wind: see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.8-11/1:421-423), SD 3.11; also D 1:214 Vism 11.27 Abhs 154.

¹¹⁴ *Ayaṃ...kāyo rūpī cātum, mahā, bhūtiko mātā, pettika, sambhavo odana, kummāsūpacayo anicc’ucchādana, parimaddana, bhedana, viddhamsana, dhammo: D 2.83 f/1:76 (×2) = M 109.9/2:17; M 23.4/1:144, 74.9/500; S 35.105/-4:83 = A 9.15.2/4:386; S 55.21/5:369 f; Nigrodha, miga J 12/1:146. Cf Divy 180: śatana, patana, vikirāṇa, vidhvamsanā, dharmatā. See **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74.9/1:500), SD 16.1 tr & nn. This statement means that consciousness here (in a physical being) is dependent on the physical body.*

It should be regarded as impermanent, as suffering [unsatisfactory], as a disease, as a boil, as a dart, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as void, as not self.¹¹⁵

One who regards the body thus would abandon desire for the body, love for the body, and dependence on the body. (D 2; M 23, 109; S 35.105; A 9.15, 55.21; J 12)

B. The pure body: a spiritual perspective

4 The body as vehicle of awakening

4.1 VALUE OF THE HUMAN BODY.

4.1.1 Avoiding the extremes. From the very beginning, Buddhism has regarded the human body as a “middle way” to awakening rising above, that is, avoiding, *the extremes of self-indulgence*—the nihilist materialistic view—and *the extreme of self-mortification*—the eternalist view. While the former is the view that this is our only life and there is neither good nor evil (amoralism), the latter is the view that there is an eternal soul or entity that continues after death in a heaven or a hell, and the belief in some kind of supreme being who is a creator, etc.

The Buddha discourages self-indulgence in sense-pleasures as being “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]” [1.2.2]. Sense-pleasures are “**low**” (*hīna*) in that they are vile (*lāṃaka*), that is, they often involve something unwholesome or evil: it is basically a chemical process which we glorify when we are attached to it. Sense-pleasures are “**vulgar**” (*gamma*), literally, the way of the villagers, that is, a common and lowly trait. A villager tends to be very limited in his worldview; so is someone who is caught up in sexual addiction. Sense-pleasures are “**worldly**” (*pothujjanika*), the way of the world; it fills and crowds the world. The crowd is easily enticed by promise of pleasure, moving on like lemmings to certain disaster. The crowd does not think. Sense-pleasures are “**ignoble**” (*anariya*): it is not the way of the noble saints, since they have risen above lust.

Above all, sense-pleasures are “**not connected with the goal**” (*anatta, samhita*). Sense-pleasures are the activities of the five sense-doors, with the mind conjuring them up according to our sense of lack. As long as the physical senses are excitable on a lowly animal level, driven on by the samsaric instinct to perpetuate themselves, the mind will never be still, but always running after pleasurable feelings, and suffering the pain of their absence, or the boredom of sameness.¹¹⁶

The Buddha rejects the practice of self-mortifying the “evil” body as being “painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable].” Note that while “the devotion to sensual pleasures” (*kāma, sukh’-allikānuyoga*) is described as being “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” “the devotion to self-mortification” (*atta, kilamathānuyoga*) is said to be only “painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable].” This is because despite being “painful,” self-mortification, with some moral virtue, can bring about a divine afterlife; but such a goal is still “ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” because we are still caught up in samsara, and not liberated from suffering.

What has been said thus far should be reflected with the key statement of **the Rohitassa Sutta** (S 2.26), where the Buddha declares,

Friend, in this very fathom-long body¹¹⁷ endowed with perception and mind, that I make known the world, the arising of the world, the ending of the world, and the way leading to the ending of the world. (S 2.26.9/1:62), SD 7.2

¹¹⁵ This para—*aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato sam-anupassato*—as in **Mahā Mālūṅkyā,putta S** (M 64.9/1:435). See also n at head of this section.

¹¹⁶ Cf *sukh’ allikānuyoga*, “devotion of pleasure,” see **Pāsādika S** (D 29.23/3:130), SD 40a.6.

¹¹⁷ “In this very fathom-long body,” *imasmiñ-ñ-eva vyāma, matte kaḷevare*. The word *kaḷevare* is probably cognate with the English “cadaver.” Comy glosses these 4 statements as those of the 4 noble truths. Thus the Buddha shows: “I do not, friend, make known these 4 truths in external things like grass and wood, but right here in this body composed of the 4 great elements.” (SA 1:117 f)

The word for “body” here is not the usual *kāya* or *sarīra*, but a rare one, *kaḷevara*, which is probably cognate with the English “cadaver.” The Commentary glosses these 4 phrases as referring to *the 4 noble truths*. Thus the Buddha shows: “I do not, friend, make known these 4 truths in external things like grass and wood, but right here in this body composed of the 4 great elements.” (SA 1:117 f). The total effect of the word *kaḷevara*, not brought out in the English translation is that it is both conscious as well as impermanent and foul on closer examination.

This human body is capable of both pleasure and pain, but as the one is the absence of the other, and the one yearns for the other, both feelings are not worth clinging to. Nor is bodily neutral feeling worthwhile, as it leads only to boredom. In other words, we do not need to tease pleasure out of the body nor drive pain into it. It is merely a frail frame on which we hang our ethereal cloak of consciousness. The body dissolves away, leaving the ethereal cloak to move on to invest a new body. [4.3]

4.1.2 The subhumans and human birth. Of all the bodies found on earth, in the heavens and in their interstices, the most precious is the human body. A subhuman body is ever filled with some kind of lack and suffering. A heavenly body is either too pleasure-bound so that its bearer is intoxicated into believing he has eternal life and so neglect the spiritual life. Or, the ethereal heavenly body is totally dependent on karmic fruits so that when they are exhausted, the being falls again into the samsaric cycle.

The human body is best for spiritual cultivation because it experiences both pain and pleasure. We are also able to use our minds. Dhammapāla gives this etymology: on account of the preponderance [abundance] of mind, he is called “man” (*manassa ussannatāya manussā*, VvA 18).

Contrary to folk Buddhism and Buddhist mythology,¹¹⁸ it is *not* difficult to obtain human birth. This popular wrong view is encouraged by the misquoting of the parable of the blind turtle alluded to in the later works without reference to its context in **the Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129) where it is stated:

Bhikshus, suppose a man were to throw into the ocean a yoke with a single hole in it. Then the east winds carry it westwards; the west winds carry it eastwards; the north winds carry it southwards; the south winds carry it northwards. Suppose a blind turtle were to come up from the ocean depths once in a hundred years.

What do you think, bhikshus? Would that blind turtle put his neck through the yoke with a single hole in it?”

“Even if it could, venerable sir, it would only happen after a very long time.”

“Even then, bhikshus, it is more likely that the blind turtle would put his neck through the single-holed yoke than would the fool, once fallen into a lower world (*vinipāta*),¹¹⁹ regain the human state, I say! Why is that?

Because in the lower worlds *there is no righteous living*,¹²⁰ no doing of what is wholesome, no performance of merit. There they eat each other, preying on the weak.

(M 129,24/3:169), SD 2.22

A very close parallel to this parable is found in **the Chiggaḷa Sutta 2** (S 56.47). In both cases, the reference is to rebirth in “a lower world” (*vinipāta*), that is, as a preta (departed being), an animal, or a hell-being [1.3.1], or as an asura (narcissistic demon or narcissism embodied), according to later mythology. The Chiggaḷa Sutta 2, however, mentions *the not knowing the 4 noble truths* as the reason for the difficulty of regaining human birth.¹²¹

The context of the two passages is identical and should be well noted, that is to say, “the fool, once fallen into a lower world” would find it very difficult to regain the human birth. This is because there is no practice of Dharma or making merit there (according to the Bāla,paṇḍita Sutta, M 129), or knowledge of the 4 noble truths (according to the Chiggaḷa Sutta 3, S 56.47).

It is in this connection that the statement of the difficulty of human birth should be understood.

¹¹⁸ See eg Thī 500; Miln 204; DhsA 60.

¹¹⁹ A general term for the 4 lower suffering states: the animal kingdom, the realm of the departed, the asura realm and the hells. See Vism 13.92 f.

¹²⁰ *Dhamma, cariya*, or practice of the Dharma.

¹²¹ S 56.47/5:455 f @ SD 57.12. Cf **Chiggaḷa S 1** (S 56.45/5:453 f).

4.1.3 Human birth is easy to obtain. On the other hand, it is very easy for celestial beings to “fall” (*cavati*) from their divine state and be reborn into the human realm. It is unheard of that a celestial being is ever reborn from a lower heaven to a higher one, except perhaps when he is a non-returned in the Pure Abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*). The reason for this divine devolution is that they are states that are supported by our store of good karma and other factors (such as the local life-span). Once the karmic support is exhausted or the divine being reaches the end of his lifespan, he would “fall” (*cavati*) from that state.

According to **the Sāleyyaka Sutta** (M 41) it is easy to be reborn as a human being, or even as a divine being—aspire for it. But there is a catch: we need to live morally virtuous lives. Moral virtue is the fuel that propels us into such births and keeps us on that trajectory. Live a morally virtuous life and aspire for such a birth, and you will obtain it.¹²² The quality of the human state that we are reborn into, too, will very much depend on the kind of karma we have in store.

One question remains. In **the Sumedhā Therī,gāthā**, the nun Sumedhā says:

*Sāra rūpaṃ pheṇa,piṇḍōpamassa kāya,kalino asārassa
Khandhe passa anicce sarāhi niraye bahu,viḥāte*

Remember that the form of this worst of bodies
is without substance like a lump of froth.¹²³
See the impermanence of the aggregates!
remember the hells, they bring much distress. (Thī 501)

Is she saying that the human body is “the worst of bodies” (*kāya,kali*). Again here, there context must be understood. What is Sumedhā referring to is a generic idea of the body, that is, it impermanent and foul in nature. Even though the human body is the vehicle for awakening, it is just that, a vehicle, a raft,¹²⁴ one made of flesh and bones, supported by food, full of impurities, and impermanent.

4.1.4 It is difficult to remain human. We may *have* a human body, but it is difficult to *be* human, so that in the end it is also difficult for us to *remain* in a human body. This truth is reflected in this well known Dhammapada verse:

<i>Kiccho manussa,paṭilābho</i>	Difficult it is to gain a human state;
<i>kicchaṃ maccāna jīvitam</i>	difficult is the life of mortals;
<i>kicchaṃ saddhamma,savanaṃ</i>	difficult it is to hear the Dharma;
<i>kiccho buddhānaṃ uppādo</i>	difficult is the arising of Buddhas. (Dh 182)

We could render *manussa,paṭilābha* quite literally as “obtaining the human birth,” but I take *paṭilābha* to refer to an abstract state (“humanity, humanness”) rather than narrowly as “human birth.” If this is taken merely to mean “human birth,” then it is difficult to reconcile this statement with the teachings of **the Sāleyyaka Sutta** (M 41) [4.1.3].

Furthermore, it must be understood that our body is not merely *physical*: it is not sustained merely by solid food, but various kind of food. In fact, we sustained by 4 kinds of food (*āhāra*), as stated in **the Putta,maṃsa Sutta** (S 12.63), that is to say,

(1) material food	(<i>kabaḷīṅkāra āhāra</i>);	
(2) contact [sense-stimuli]	(<i>phass’āhāra</i>);	
(3) mental volition	(<i>mano,sañcetanāhāra</i>); and	
(4) consciousness	(<i>viññāṇ’āhāra</i>).	(S 12.63/2:97-100) & SD 20.6 ¹²⁵

¹²² See M 41/1:285-290 @ SD 5.7.

¹²³ See **Pheṇa,piṇḍa S** (S 22.95/3:140-143), SD 17.12.

¹²⁴ See **the parable of the raft, Alagaddûpama S** (M 22.13-14/1:135 f), SD 2.13.

¹²⁵ MA 1:207-215; SA 2:22-27, 104-113; KhpA 76-78.

Material food (*kabaliṅkāra āhāra*) is basically the kind of material or solid food that we take to sustain or build our physical body. This is the support for the physical body that is the basis for the other three kinds of non-material food.

In the mental body, **contact** is the special condition for feeling, and contact as food produces the three kinds of feelings, that is, the pleasurable, the painful and the neutral.¹²⁶

Mental volition is the special condition for consciousness, and mental volition as food produces the three kinds of existence, that is, the sense-world, the form world, and the formless world.

Consciousness is the special condition for name-and-form, and consciousness as food produces name-and-form on the occasion of rebirth.

Material food only sustains our physical body, giving it bulk or a shape that we desire, but we are reminded that

<i>Appa-s, sutāyaṃ puriso balivaddho 'va jīrati maṃsāni tassa vaḍḍhanti paññā tassa na vaḍḍhati</i>	A person of little learning [who is weak in listening] ages just like an ox: his flesh grows, his wisdom grows not.	(Dh 152)
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The person who has heard much (*bahu-s, suta*) is a wise one. Here, *listening* is a synecdoche for beneficial learning, which is the basis for spiritual progress. The Dhammapada verse here compares a foolish to an ox. If the foolishness is habitual, we would indeed mentally devolve into such a state in this life itself, and after death actually be reborn as such a subhuman being.¹²⁷ In **the Kukkura, vatika Sutta** (M 57), the Buddha declares to the young Koliya, Punṇa, a cow-vow ascetic (wearing horns and a tail), and the naked ascetic (*acelaka*), Seniya, a dog-vow ascetic (behaving in a dog-like manner), that they would be reborn as the animal which they habitually imitate, no matter how piously!¹²⁸

We are often affected by others, by our work, and our environment, and our mental states, too, affects others, our work and our environment. Caught in the midst of our private realities and external situations, we regularly swing through the six realms. In our excruciating pains and mental torments, we fall into the lowest of the realms, the hells.

In our ignorance and fear, easily succumbing to the tricks and threats of others, we are caught in the predictability of the animal realm. Afflicted by insatiable cravings, whether through lack or despite plenty, we are chained to the shadowy preta realm. Our jealous struggles and violent ambitions turn us into ruthless asuras or titans measuring others in terms of what profit or pleasure they can bring us.

Occasionally, during breaks and holidays, when we are able to get away from our work, from those we dislike, and from an oppressive environment, we momentarily taste a heavenly respite. Maybe it is a good meditation, or an invigorating Dharma study, or the pleasant presence of true-hearted friends. But it all passes on too soon. If we are skillful enough, we might just be able to remain on a human level, that is, until the samsaric cycle of the realms start all over again.

In the cyclic existence, it is difficult to evolve spiritually, to be our true selves. The rat-race turns each of us into a mere social unit, a “statistical individual,” that is, a member of a group, who in fact has no real existence apart from the group and who, therefore possesses no true individuality. Such a person often simply accepts the standards, values, and realities of the group to which he or she belongs. As such, in the case of statistical individuals, we have a comparatively low level of consciousness.

To get out of the rut, we must *want* to grow spiritually, and be *able* to do so. Sometimes, it appears to be such a heavy responsibility that we are tempted to try to hand it all over to someone else, maybe to a “God”, or some fashionable Oriental or Western guru-figure, or some political leader, in the hope that he will arrange everything for us with as little trouble as possible. We have handed over our remote control to others!

¹²⁶ On feeling, see *Vedanā*, SD 17.3.

¹²⁷ See **Soreyya-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 3.9/1:325-332) for a story where a man becomes what he lusts after (ie, a woman). See **Self & Selves**, SD 26.9 (1.6.3).

¹²⁸ M 57/1:387-392 @ SD 23.11.

To be *able* to grow is to start with a truly self-affirming method of personal development. It starts with an unconditional self-acceptance: we have to start right where we are, and progress from there. We need to understand the personal nature of impermanence: we can change for the better. We need to reflect on the characteristic of not-self: there is no one who has failed, no problem person—only difficult situations and problems.

Accept the problem situation and define it. Examine for its causes and conditions. Look deeper and you will see the various ways out. Choose the best path and free yourself.

In other words, we do not live by rice and bread alone, not by faith alone, but we are nourished by sense-stimuli, mental volition and consciousness. However, even when the physical body is deprived of material food and dies, our mental body or existential consciousness¹²⁹ continues to be become what we think, and to be reborn according to how we use our sense-faculties.¹³⁰

4.2 INNER PURITY. In this section, we have seen that our body is valuable in that it is the vehicle to awakening, that it is neither good or evil in itself [4.1.1], that it works closely with the mind [4.1.2], that human birth is not difficult to obtain [4.1.3], but it is difficult to remain in a human state [4.1.4]. Another significant feature of the human body in this connection: although it is *externally* it is necessarily foul and impure due to its physical nature, *internally*, it can be pure. Indeed, there is no other way that such a spiritual purity can arise except from within a person.

On a simple level, this means keeping the body *healthy*. The reason for this is simple enough: only a healthy body can support a healthy mind.

*Ārogya, paramā lābhā
santuṭṭhī paramaṃ dhanam
vissāsa, paramā ñāṭī
nibbānam paramaṃ sukham*

Health is the highest gain,
contentment is the greatest wealth,
the trustworthy are the best relatives,
nirvana is the highest bliss. (Dh 204)

An ideal Buddhist, as such, is one with a healthy mind in a healthy body: *mens sana in corpora sano*. This well known Latin saying, also translated as “a sound mind in a sound body,” is derived from *Satire* 10 (“Wrong desire is the source of suffering,” 10.356)¹³¹ by the Roman poet Juvenal (late 1st-early 2nd cents). It forms part of his answer to the question of what is really desirable in life:

*Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano
fortem posce animum mortis terrore carentem,
qui spatium uitae extremum inter munera
ponat
naturae, qui ferre queat quoscumque labores,
nesciat irasci, cupiat nihil et potiores
Herculis aerumnas credat saeuosque
labores
et uenere et cenis et pluma Sardanapalli.

monstro quod ipse tibi possis dare; semita
certe
tranquillae per uirtutem patet unica uitae.*

You should pray for a sound mind in a sound body;
for a stout heart that has no fear of death,
and deems the length of days the least of Nature’s
gifts;
that can endure any kind of toil;
that knows neither wrath nor desire,
and thinks that the woes and hard labours of
Hercules
are better than the loves and the banquets and
the down cushions of Sardanapalus.¹³²
What I commend to you, you can give to yourself;

for it is assuredly through virtue that lies the one
and only road to a life of peace.

(Satire 10.356-364)¹³³

¹²⁹ See *Vīññāna*, SD 17.8a (6).

¹³⁰ Further see **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (1.3.3) Momentary beings.

¹³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satires_of_Juvenal.

¹³² Prob the last king of Assyria at Nineveh, a legendary figure know for his opulence and debauchery.

¹³³ Tr GG Ramsay, 1918: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/juvenal_satires_10.htm.

Traditional commentators gloss Juvenal as reminding his fellow Roman citizens who uttered foolish prayers that all that they should pray for were physical and mental health.

It first appeared in English in the early 17th century. In time and out of context, the famous phrase has taken on a range of meanings, such as that only a healthy body can produce or sustain a healthy mind. Its most general usage is to express the concept of a healthy balance in our mode of life, a trend popular in the 19th century English public schools, with their emphasis on rigorous physical development (cold baths, sports, etc), underpinning an intellectual development.

The satirical connotation of the phrase, that it would be nice to both have a sound mind in a sound body, is a more recent interpretation of what Juvenal may have intended to express. The phrase is foreshadowed by (if not a paraphrase from) the Greek, *nous igiis en somati igii*, a saying of the pre-Socratic philosopher Thales of Miletus (c 624 BCE–c 546 BCE).

The above lines from Juvenal's *Satire* 10 have a beautiful Buddhist ring to them, especially the closing lines that places virtue as the foundation for a peaceful life. However, the Buddha differs with the opening line, and instead says, in **the Iṭṭha Sutta** (A 5.43):

Householder, there are these five things that are desirable, beloved and agreeable but difficult to obtain in the world. What are the five?

Long life, beauty, happiness, fame, and rebirth in heaven. Of these five things, householder, **I do not teach that they are to be obtained through prayer (*āyācana, hetu*) nor through wishing (*patthanā, hetu*).**¹³⁴ If one could obtain them through prayer or through wishing, who would not obtain them?...

For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have rebirth in heaven, it is not proper that he should pray for rebirth in heaven or take delight in doing so. He should rather follow a way of life that is conducive to rebirth in heaven [such as the practice of giving, moral conduct and mental cultivation]. By following such a path, he would obtain rebirth in heaven.

(A 5.43/3:47-49 abridged), SD 47.2

Furthermore, early Buddhism tends to place great emphasis on *mental health*, especially where the body fails us: “My body may be sick but my mind will not be sick”¹³⁵ [2.2]. This is clearly understandable since the Buddhist goal is awakening in spiritual liberation. In fact, the Buddhist emphasis on mental health or inner purity is unparalleled in world religions.

However, the early Buddhist notion of inner purity as against outer pollution (as in Brahmanism), but it is that of appreciating the realities of the physical body. That is to say, *it is in understanding the true nature of the body, and accepting this, that the body is a vehicle to awakening*.

The Vatthūpama Sutta (M 7) tells us of a pious brahmin Sundarika who baptizes himself regularly in the waters of sacred rivers, and when he invites the Buddha to do so, too, the Buddha declares to him that *it is not external baptism that purifies, but the inner cleansing which is more efficacious and truly liberating*:

(1) *Bāhukam adhikakkaṇ ca
gayam sundarikam mapi*¹³⁸

The Bāhukā¹³⁶ and the Adhikalkā,¹³⁷
Gayā¹³⁹ and the Sundarikā,¹⁴⁰ too,

¹³⁴ “Wishing,” *patthanā*, also “desire, request, aspiration, request, prayer, vow.”

¹³⁵ S 22.1/3:1-5 @ SD 5.4.

¹³⁶ Comy says that Bāhukā, Sundarikā, Sarassatī (Skt *Sarasvatī*) and Bāhu, matī are rivers, Adhikakkā (Skt **Adhikalka*), Gayā and Payāga (Skt *Prāyaga*) are fords (*tittha*) (MA 1:178 f). The **Bāhukā** may be the Bāhudā of the Mahābhārata and Harivaṃsa, and identical with the river Dhabala, now called Dhumela or Burha Rāpti, a tributary of the Rāpti in Oudh. (Law 1932: 36). At J 5:387, 388, *bahuka* is simply an adj meaning “much,” and not a river’s name.

¹³⁷ Comy says that **Adhikakkā** is a ford. The Skt name is conjectured, based on CPD: svv adhikakka, kakka.

¹³⁸ So Be; Ce Ee Se *sundarikām api*; vl *sundarikām mahim*.

¹³⁹ **Gayā** today comprises the modern town of Shahebganj on the north and the ancient town of Gayā on the south. Bodhgayā (Buddha, gayā) is 5 mi (1.3 km) to the south of Gayā. (Law 1932: 26). Cf Mvst 2.51 f.

¹⁴⁰ From the texts and comys. we only know that this river is in Kosala (eg S 1:167).

- sarassatiṃ payāgañ ca
atho bāhu,matiṃ nadim;
niccam pi bālo pakkhando
kaṇha,kammo na sujjhati*
- (2) *Kim sundarikā karissati
kim payāgā kim bāhukā nadī
Verim kata,kibbisam naram
na hi nam sodhaye pāpa,kamminam*
- (3) *Suddhassa ve sadā phaggu
Suddhass'uposatho sadā
suddhassa sucikamma
sadā sampajjate vataṃ*
- (4) *Idh'eva sināhi brāhmaṇa
Sabba,bhūtesu karohi khemataṃ
Sace musā na bhaṇasi
sace pāṇam na himsasi*
- (5) *Sace adinnaṃ nādiyasi
saddahāno amaccharī
kim kāhasi gayam gantvā
udapāno pi te gayā ti.*
- the Sarasvatī¹⁴¹ and the Prayāg,¹⁴²
and the river Bāhu,matī¹⁴³—
a fool may jump into them with pleasure,
still, his dark deed is not cleansed.
- What will the Sundarikā do for you?
Or the river Prayāg, or the Bāhukā?
Who has done wrong, hostile to people,
an evil-doer—how can he purify himself?
- For the pure, it is always a holy day!¹⁴⁴
For the pure, it is always a precept day!¹⁴⁵
The pure, whose deeds are pure,¹⁴⁶
always fully succeeds in his vow.
- Wash right here,¹⁴⁷ brahmin!
Towards all being give safety.¹⁴⁸
If you speak no falsehood,
if you harm no life,
- If you do not take the not-given,
Faithful, free from selfishness—
What need is there to go to Gayā?¹⁴⁹
Any well is Gayā to you!

(M 7,20/1:39; DA 1:139), SD 28.12

Water ablution, lustration and baptism are external and ritual that do not reflect the real nature of the person or the body, which remains uncleansed. Indeed, such external acts could give us the false notion that we are pure, so that we are more likely to relapse into our old evil ways, knowing that we could be purified again through such rituals.

The Buddha teaches that the true cleansing of the body can only properly done at its root, that is, the mind. When the mind is rid of the unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion, the body, too, is cleansed by the inner cleansing. Such a cleansing begins with an awareness and acceptance of what we

¹⁴¹ There are a number of Indian rivers today by this name. The **Sarassatī** here is evidently the Vedic Sarasvatī, identified with the Ghaggar-Hakra river, which is accepted by Christian Lassen (*Indische Alterthumskunde*) and Max Müller (Sacred Books of the East 32: 60) and Marc Aurel Stein: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saravati_River. See Law 1932: 39. Cf Mvst 2.51 f.

¹⁴² **Prayāg** (*Payāga*, Skt *Prayāga*) is a ford across the Ganges (MA 1:178). Prayāg is an alternative name for modern Allahabad, one of the four sites of the Kumbha Mela, the best know and most massive of Indian pilgrimage-festivals. It is however uncertain whether this the site of the Prayāga of Vatthūpama Sutta.

¹⁴³ **Bāhu.matī** may be the Bāgmatī, a sacred river of Buddhists in Nepal. Also called Bachmati, it is said to have been created by the Buddha Kakusandha (Law 1932: 36). On the past Buddhas, see **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14), SD 49.8 Streamwinner(2).

¹⁴⁴ *Phaggu* (Skt *Phalgu*) is a blessed or auspicious constellation, and also the spring season; also refers to *Phāl-guna*, the full moon of Feb-Mar, the *Nakṣatra Phalgunī* (Phalgunī Constellation), an auspicious day for lustration, Qu at DA 1:139. Comy says that brahmins believe that whoever bathes (in a sacred river or ford) on the full-moon day of the month of Phagguna is cleansed of the evil done during the year (MA 1:179).

¹⁴⁵ Lit, "For the pure, it is always the sabbath [precept day]."

¹⁴⁶ *Suci,kamma*, cf Dh 24.

¹⁴⁷ Comy: In the Buddha's teaching (MA 1:179).

¹⁴⁸ Comy: By way of lack of fear, welfare and lovingkindness (*abhaya hita,bhāva metta*, MA 1:179).

¹⁴⁹ It is interesting here that the Buddha mentions "Gayā" rather than "Bāhukā" mentioned above. Clearly here the Buddha is addressing his own followers. Cf the advice on going on pilgrimage to the holy places: see **Mahā.-parinibbāna S** (D 16.5.8/2:140 f) & SD 9 (7g).

really are, and renouncing those negative tendencies by replacing it with unconditional self-love and other-love, by accepting others as we would accept ourselves, breaking down the false boundaries between self and other, between I and thou.

The most charitable act we can do therefore is that of renunciation, such as becoming a monk or a nun for the sake of spiritual liberation in this life itself. **True renunciation** is not the giving up of parents and family, but rather that opening of our hearts and minds beyond the biological family, to a broader family of mankind and all living beings. It is an all-inclusive act of unconditionally accepting the world as it is, and to be a shining example of the spiritual heights that it can reach.

If monastics (monks and nuns) understand and exemplify themselves as true renunciants, then they would stand out as the ideal of the true individual. If they become career priests, or become money-driven or power-driven or status-conscious, or become overly intellectual, then they have become overdressed jesuits and tartuffes that we best avoid. They are not really “left-home” people, but those who have left home for a bigger house and bigger worldly fortune. They have mistaken the body for the breath, the mind for the spirit. They are stuck in the world, and will remain so for a long time to come.

4.3 WE ARE THE WORLD. We have noted earlier on [4.1.1], the Buddha declaring to Rohitassa that the world, its arising, its ending and the way to its ending are all in this very body of ours. This statement clearly refers to the 4 noble truths, that they are all manifested within our own being. Through self-understanding, we are truly liberated.

In **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), the Buddha presents this universal formula in from another angle, that of the six senses, thus:

3 Bhikshus, I will teach you the all.¹⁵⁰ Listen to it.

And what, bhikshus, is the all?

The eye	and	forms,
the ear	and	sounds,
the nose	and	smells,
the tongue	and	tastes,
the body	and	touches,
the mind	and	mind-objects. ¹⁵¹

This, bhikshus, is called the all.

4 Bhikshus, if anyone were to say thus: ‘Rejecting¹⁵² this all, I shall make known another all’—that would be empty talk on his part.

When questioned he would not be able to reply and, moreover, he would meet with vexation.

And what is the reason for this?

Because, bhikshus, that would not be within his domain. (S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1

This statement is the basis of Buddhist epistemology, a theory of knowledge. All that we can know comes through our six senses; they are the tools of our knowing. All that we can know are the objects of our senses. *We are* the world.

When we understand this and accept this understanding, then we are in a good position to use the body as a tool for self-awakening. We are free from the need of approval and domination of a father-figure or supreme being, or any form of otherness. There is no more *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* at a numinous Other. For, we know that all these are *mind-made*. Just as a magic show is only fascinating when we are *ignorant* of the process of the illusion, even so we are terrified and fascinated at the mystery of the numinous not realizing it is manufactured by our inner goodness. Ignorance fascinates, wisdom liberates.

The numinous is not out there; the truth is not out there. The numinous is right here in this very body; the truth is in here, right within ourselves. It is clearly seen with the closed eyes of clear stillness. It is the

¹⁵⁰ On the all (*sabba*), see SD 7.1 Streamwinner1 & 5.

¹⁵¹ “Mind-objects,” *dhammā*, alt tr “mental phenomena.”

¹⁵² “Rejecting,” *paccakkhāya*, lit “having rejected.”

totality and wholeness that fill our being when we transcend the physical senses, and free the mind, so that it touches reality directly and is one with it. And when we return to our senses, we see a wholesome new world, we have truly made all things anew. For, we are then able and willing to embrace every being unconditionally with boundless love and joy.

4.4 SEEING THE WHOLE. From the Sabba Sutta (S 35.23), we know that our sources of knowledge are our six sense, and our sense-data (what we can know) are the sense-objects. We also know that all such sense-experiences are “recognized” (*saññā*) and “put together” (*saṅkhāra*) by the mind [3.1]. The mind plays a maestro movie director with a cast of countless million replete with the most mind-boggling stage effects and the most sophisticated props. The mind puts together what it wants us to experience, but very often what we experience is only bits and pieces, cameo shots, of our favourite actors, scenes and episodes. It is never the whole story.

To see the whole story, we need to take charge of the mental director himself. Indeed, when do so, in the calm and clear stage of our minds, we see ourselves in all the actors, effects and props. They are all part and parcel of our being: they are all mind-made. We no more see our lives in bits and pieces, but as a meaningful panorama, a cosmic drama without beginning, without end. Then we realize that there is no actor in it at all: there are no actors, only the acting. We begin to understand how empty a stage our minds are; an empty stage that is capable of any kind of movie magic of magical illusion. Only in seeing the whole picture of our being, would we realize this emptiness and wholeness.

If we understand all this, then we also understand how craving (*taṇhā*) arises. When we are only able to see ourselves in bits and pieces and view others in a similar manner, we always feel that something is missing. It is like being kept interrupted while we are watching an interesting movie, and worst of all, we do not know how it all ends. So we remain unsatisfied, feeling deep sense of lack. We have seen parts, but not the whole. This is craving.

The Subhā Therī, gāthā (Thī 366-399) is very instructive here. It is one of the longest poems in the early Buddhist canon, is also one of the most dramatic episodes in all hagiography. The narrative poem makes a highly effective use of dramatic contrast of the worldly or sensual (the rogue) against the spiritual (Subhā).

The story takes place in open nature bursting with the fertility and colour of spring. The nun Subhā is walking toward the forest and is accosted by a drunken youth who woos her. Then nun pleads with him to return to his senses, but he is drunk, and intoxicated with lust for her. The lust-driven youth uses all kinds of poetic language to win her, but the saintly nun adamantly rejects him.

The nun Subhā tries to clear his mind with teachings of the body’s impurity, but he is too intoxicated to understand. Why is he so fascinated with her? The youth declares that she has beautiful eyes. Again, she explains it by way of the perception of foulness, reflecting on the eye’s structure and natural characteristics.

Then, in a dramatic turn, she plucks out one of her eyes and hands it to the rogue, who is shocked into the reality of the situation. A thing of beauty is only in its own context, but when plucked out of its place, its beauty is gone.

The more lust we have for a thing, the more traumatic it is when it turns out to be other than what we perceive it be. Samvega finally arises in the trembling man, and his passion ceases at once (ThīA 246). Jolted back into sanity, he begs for her forgiveness and declares contrition, finally realizing the true dangers of his trespass, and he leaves (ThīA 246). Subhā, relieved of her predicament, goes to see the Buddha, and seeing him, her eye is whole again.¹⁵³

To fully love oneself is to see oneself as the totality of all our parts and pieces: we are not an episode; we are an unfinished story. Our story only begins to end when we see how our lives are intimately interlinked with those of others and with the nature than embraces us.

To truly love others we must never see them merely as a figment of our imagination, our negative emotion played out in another. We tend to project what we like or dislike onto others, and accept or reject them accordingly. We must see them as whole beings, or at least beings who have yet to become whole.

¹⁵³ See **Subhā Thī, SD 20.7** Streamwinner(3.3).

5 We are *not* merely human

5.1 DHYANA: JOY BEYOND THE BODY. So what happens when we see our body as a whole; what is or are the benefits of seeing our body and mind as a whole? First of all, is that we see that bliss does not arise only through the body. In fact, we are capable of greater bliss if we let the body settle down in complete stillness. We will experience a higher level of suprasomatic (beyond the body) or extrasensory bliss. The Buddha experienced such a bliss as a seven-year-old child, meditating under a jambu-tree during the ploughing festival.

In the **Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), the Buddha alludes to this dramatic episode of his childhood meditation. Indeed, it is the focus of the turning-point in the Bodhisattva's quest for awakening, when he realizes that he has to abandon both the two extremes, and seek the middle way, which begins with the bliss of deep meditation:

31 I thought thus, "I recall¹⁵⁴ that when my father the Sakyan was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, zest and joy born of solitude. Could that be the path to awakening?"

Then following on that memory, I realized, "That *is* the path to awakening!"

32 I thought thus, "Why do I fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?" I thought thus, "**I do not fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states!**"¹⁵⁵

33 I thought thus, "It is not easy to attain that pleasure with a body so excessively emaciated. Suppose I ate some solid food—some boiled rice and porridge." And I ate some solid food.

Now at that time the five monks¹⁵⁶ were waiting upon me, thinking, "If our recluse Gotama achieve some higher state, he will inform us." But when I ate the boiled rice and gruel, the five monks were disgusted and left me, thinking, "The recluse Gotama now lives luxuriously. He has given up the quest and reverted to luxury!"

34 Now when I had eaten solid food and regained my strength, then quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, zest and joy born of solitude. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

(M 36,31-34/1:246 f), SD 1.12

The message of this Mahā Saccaka Sutta account is that *happiness is a vital basis for good meditation*. This teaching is so important that we can clearly see it in the formula of the seven awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*). Here, in this tabulation, we see a striking parallel between the full *sāmañña,phala* (fruits of asceticism) account of the dhyanas and the seven awakening-factors:

The 7 awakening-factors

(1) Mindfulness

(2) Dharma investigation

(3) Effort

(4) Zest

The sāmañña,phala (fruits of asceticism) formula¹⁵⁷

The meditator establishes mindfulness before him.

He sees that these 5 hindrances are abandoned in him; seeing that these 5 hindrances are abandoned in him,

He further exerts effort, initially made at the *mindfulness* level.

Gladness arises; because of gladness, zest arises; when the mind is zestful,

¹⁵⁴ Ploughing festival, ie, the ritual sowing (*vappa,maṅgala*), when he turned to the mindfulness of the breath (MA 2:290 f; J 1:57). On this First Dhyana episode (M 26.31 f/1:246 f) cf Chinese version, T1428.781a4-11.

¹⁵⁵ On the 2 kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the pleasure of awakening—see **Araṇa,vibhaṅga S** (M 139.9/3:233), SD 7.8. On pleasure experience by the awakened mind, see **(Kosambī) Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15), SD 10.10.

¹⁵⁶ The five monks, see SD 1.12 Streamwinner(4).

¹⁵⁷ On the 7 awakening-factors, see **Bojjhaṅga Sīla S** (S 46.3/5:67-70), SD 10.15; see also Gethin 2001: 170-172 for details.

- (5) Tranquillity The body becomes tranquil; when the body is tranquil, he knows happiness.
- (6) Concentration When he is happy, his mind is concentrated, he enters and remains in the 1st dhyana, accompanied by initial application and sustained application. Free of initial application and sustained application, with zest and happiness born of solitude, he enters and remains in the 2nd dhyana, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration...
- (7) Equanimity And he experiences happiness *with the body*.¹⁵⁸ He enters and remains in the 3rd dhyana, of which the noble ones declare, “Happily he dwells happily in equanimity and mindfulness.”... He enters and dwells in the 4th dhyana, with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

What does all this mean? It means that we are capable of great bliss. *Despite* our human body, even *because* of our human body, we are capable of divine bliss and to reach the heavens even here and now. Heaven and nirvana are not in the after-life; they can be experienced and attained in this life itself.

5.2 THE THREE WORLDS.

5.2.1 Locational and mental worlds. Structurally, our human body is of the sense-world (*kāma, -loka*), so called because we depend on the five physical senses (*pañc'indriya*) and the mind. But there are other worlds; two other worlds, to exact: the form world (*rūpa, loka*) and the formless world (*arūpa, loka*). These two worlds are both locational, that is, spatio-temporal dimensions, as well as meditative states. In other words, the human meditator, in deep concentration or dhyana, is able to attain and dwell in such profound states of bliss.

In Buddhist meditation, we, as a rule, begin by sitting quietly and comfortably to calm the body down so that we are no more troubled by it in any way. We then go on to still the mind by keeping it focussed on a meditation object, usually the breath. As we do this, the 5 mental hindrances—sense-desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restless and remorse, and doubt—are overcome. The mind is then focussed and we attain samadhi, even dhyana.

5.2.2 The 4 form dhyanas. When the hindrance-free mind is able to direct itself to the object and stay with it, it is filled with zest or joyful interest in it, and there is bliss or happiness (that is, total physical comfort) in the focussed mind. The whole body-mind feels like a well-mixed ball of lather.¹⁵⁹ This is the first dhyana.

With continued stillness and focus, there is no more need to directing and stabilizing the mind, but only zest and happiness with the fully concentrated mind. The body-mind feels like lake, brimful with cool water, raining from the sky and bubbling from underneath.¹⁶⁰ This is the second dhyana.

Letting go of the zest, which is gross, compared to the happiness, the body-mind further focusses in equanimity. The body-mind like a lotus submerged in and suffused by the lake's cool waters.¹⁶¹ This is the third dhyana.

Then we let go of even happiness, so that there is no experience of the duality of pain and pleasure, physical or mental. The body-mind feels like a man seated and totally enveloped in a clean and radiant white sheet. His mind is pure and radiant.¹⁶² This is the fourth dhyana. At this stage, if he wishes to, he would be able to direct his mind to cultivate special powers over his physical body to transcend matter, that is, to attain psychic powers.

¹⁵⁸ *Kāyena phassivā viharati. Phassivā* has vll: *phusivā* (Be Se), *phussivā*. MA defines *phassivā* thus: Having touched, mastered, attained it with the mental body (*nāma, kāyena phassivā pāpunitvā adhigantvā ti vuttam hoti*) (MA 1:162), ie experienced directly in one's own person (body and mind), an idiomatic expression for personal experience. Cf A 2:87.

¹⁵⁹ See **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.77-78/1:73 f) = 8.10.

¹⁶⁰ See **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.79-80/1:74 f) = 8.10.

¹⁶¹ See **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.81-82/1:75) = 8.10.

¹⁶² See **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.83-84/1:75 f) = 8.10.

5.2.3 The formless attainments. If he goes on to let go of all perception of form and all physical sense-stimuli, even the subtlest, no more sensing of self and other, he experiences only infinite space. This is the formless attainment of infinite space.¹⁶³

Then we let go of the experience of infinite space, and turn to the consciousness itself: this is the mind knowing itself. This is the formless attainment of infinite consciousness.¹⁶⁴

As we maintain a constant focus on the infinite consciousness, the consciousness begins to disappear, leaving only *infinity*. Only in letting go of the perception of infinite consciousness can we proceed to the next level, the formless attainment of nothingness.¹⁶⁵

As our experience of “nothingness” steadily deepens, we begin to understand that underlying it is *a perception that goes beyond nothingness*. If our mind is refined enough to see this, then the perception of nothingness disappears and is replaced by the formless attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. The consciousness here is so refined that *it cannot be said whether there is perceiving or not*. In other words, our consciousness is at its most subtle.¹⁶⁶

These 4 formless dhyanas, properly speaking, are simply aspects or modalities of the fourth dhyana, as they possess the same two dhyana-factors, namely, *one-pointedness and neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling* (Dhs 68). **Buddhaghosa** compares the 4 formless attainments to *a four-storey palace, with all the floors looking identical*. However, the objects of sense-pleasure at each successive floor are progressively better. Or, they are like *four pieces of cloth of identical size*, but the first is of thick cloth, the next of thin cloth, the one after the thinner cloth, and the last of the thinnest fabric. The dhyana-factors of equanimity and one-pointedness are constantly present, but become more refined at each higher level.¹⁶⁷

5.3 BETTER THAN SEX.

5.3.1 Beyond sexuality. Teachers of dhyana meditation often swear by the maxim that “dhyana is better than sex.” That is to say, the bliss of meditation is so refined and profound—something the gross body could not possibly experience—that there is no worldly pleasure to equal it. We have also noted that in **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), the Buddha somewhat humorously declares that sex and sensuality are “time-consuming” (*kālika*)¹⁶⁸ [1.3.5]. The meaning is that sexual activity is motivated by lust that fetters us to the samsaric cycle.

The main problem with sexuality—the raw pleasures of the body—is that they are never fully satisfactory: if they are, we would have had enough of it and never want it again! And when we are unable to obtain the pleasure that we lust for, we are capable of various unwholesome acts.

The meditator chooses a different path, one that bring a more sublime bliss, that transcends the body. In **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), the Buddha explains,

I thought thus, ‘Why do I fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?’ I thought thus, **‘I do not fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states!’**¹⁶⁹ (M 36,32/1:246 f), SD 1:17

With that thought he turns to the middle way of the breath meditation as attains liberation and nirvana.

In **the Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta** (M 14), we are told that Mahānāma,¹⁷⁰ despite being a once-returner,¹⁷¹ complains to the Buddha that he still has defiled mental states, especially lustful thoughts,

¹⁶³ See **Ākāśānañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.5), SD 24.15 Intro.

¹⁶⁴ See **Viññāṇañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.6), SD 24.16 Intro.

¹⁶⁵ See **Ākiñcaññ’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.7), SD 24.17 Intro.

¹⁶⁶ **N’eva,saññā,nāsaññ’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.8), SD 24.18 Intro.

¹⁶⁷ See **Paṭhama Jhāna S** (S 40.1), SD 24.11 Streamwinner(4-5).

¹⁶⁸ S 4.21/1:117 f = S 1.20.5/1:9, SD 21.4.

¹⁶⁹ On the two kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the pleasure of enlightenment—see **Araṇa,vibhaṅga S** (M 139.9/3:233), SD 7.8. On pleasure experience by the awakened mind, see **(Kosambī) Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15), SD 10.10.

¹⁷⁰ He was Sukk’odana’s son, and brother of the monks Anuruddha and Ānanda. As such, he is Suddh’odana’s nephew and the Buddha’s cousin. See Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, 1972:80 f.

despite understanding the nature of the three unwholesome roots. From the discourse, we also learn that Mahānāma has not attained any dhyana. The Buddha explains the significance of this fact:

Mahānāma, even if a noble disciple has clearly seen as it really is, with right wisdom, that sense-desires bring little solace [gratification], but much suffering, much despair, more danger here,¹⁷² so long, as he does not gain zest and joy that are apart from sense-pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or something more peaceful than that, he would not be able to be unaffected by sense-pleasures.¹⁷³

But, Mahānāma, when a noble disciple has clearly seen as it really is with right wisdom that sense-pleasures bring little solace, but much suffering, much despair, more danger here, and he gains zest and joy that are apart from sense-pleasures, from unwholesome states, or something more peaceful than that,¹⁷⁴ then he would be able to be unaffected by sense-desires.

(M 14,4/1:91), SD 4.7

Two significant points arise from the Buddha’s statement here. The first is that so long as we have not experienced dhyanic bliss, we will consider sexual pleasure to be very pleasant and desirable. The second point is that even a once-returner, what more a streamwinner, who has not attained dhyana, too, would be drawn to sexual pleasure. But there is a great difference here. While the worldly person is likely to lack self-control in such pleasures, and easily break the third precept (against sexual misconduct), the streamwinner and the once-returner would never deliberately break any of the precepts, even if he were a layman.

5.3.2 Celibacy. Those who have a good level of self-control could, if they wish, voluntarily lead lives that are sex-free, that is, live as *celibates*. Such a practice can be done periodically or on a more sustained basis. In the former case, where lay followers observe the celibacy (*brahma, cariya*) rule, usually as part of the eight precepts (*aṭṭh’anga, sīla*), is defined in **the (Tad-ah’) Uposatha Sutta** (A 3.70) as follows,

“As long as they live, the arhats, giving up incelibacy, live a celibate life; dwelling far [from evil], refraining from coupling, the way of the world.

Today I, too, for this night and this day, giving up incelibacy, live a celibate life; dwelling far [from evil], refraining from coupling, the way of the world.

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.”

(A 3.70,11/1:211), SD 4.18

¹⁷¹ See M 14.2-5/1:91 @ SD 4.7.

¹⁷² See V 4:134.

¹⁷³ The whole para: *App’assādā kāmā bahu, dukkhā bah’upāyāsā, ādīnavo ettha bhiiyo’ti— iti ce’pi, mahā, nāma, ariya, sāvakassa yathā, bhūtaṃ samma-p, paññāya sudiṭṭhaṃ hoti, so ca aññatr’eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi pīti, suchaṃ nādhigacchati, aññaṃ vā tato santataraṃ, atha kho so n’eva tāva anāvaṭṭī kāmesu hoti.* The “zest and joy that are apart from sense-desires” here refers to the pīti and sukha of the first and second dhyanas. “Something more peaceful than that” refers to the higher dhyanas. “From this passage it seems that a disciple may attain even to the second path and fruit without possessing mundane jhāna” (M:ÑB 1201 n208). Bodhi: “The first part of this statement implies that the subject is at least a stream-enterer, for he is referred to as a ‘noble disciple’ (*ariya, sāvaka*). Though the term *ariya-sāvaka* is occasionally used in loose sense that need not be taken to imply attainment of stream-entry, here the expression ‘[has clearly seen with right] wisdom’ seems to establish his identity as at least a stream-enterer. Yet the second part of the statement implies he does not possess even the first Jhāna, for the phrase used to describe what he lacks [“zest and joy that are apart from unwholesome states or something more peaceful than that”] precisely echoes the wording of the basic formula for the first Jhāna. The state “more peaceful than that” [*santataraṃ*] would, of course, be the higher Jhānas” (2001:52). This is one of the passages that Bodhi qu as “instances of stream-enterers who are not attainers of Jhānas” (2001:51 f).

¹⁷⁴ “Something more peaceful than that,” *tato santataraṃ*. Comy explains that while zest and joy (*pīti, sukha*) pertain to the first 2 dhyanas, “something higher” is connected with the 3rd and 4th dhyanas (MA 2:63). On *jhāna*, see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.75-82/1:73-76).

The rule of celibacy (along with the rest of the eight precepts) is observed by the lay follower for the duration of the *uposatha*, that is, the full moon and new moon days, but may also include the seventh or eighth day in between, that is, a weekly affair. The observance usually begins at sun-down of the preceding day and ends at sun-down of the *uposatha* itself.

The Mahā Vaccha, gotta Sutta (M 73) mentions lay followers who are celibate (*brahma, carī*) and those who are “enjoying sense-pleasures” (*kāma, bhogī*). In the former case, they are all non-returners while the latter are either once-returners or streamwinners. The Buddha says of such saints,

“Not just one, Vaccha, nor a hundred, nor two hundred, nor three hundred, nor four hundred, nor five hundred, but far more laymen, who are my disciples, householders, dressed in white, enjoying sense-pleasures,
 who are doers of the Teaching,
 followers of instructions,
 crossed beyond doubt,
 become free of uncertainties,
 gained fearless confidence, and
 independent of others, dwell in the Teaching.”

(M 73,10/1:492), SD 27.4

The same is then said *laywomen* once-returners and streamwinners. Understandably the non-returners are celibate because they have destroyed all the five lower fetters,¹⁷⁵ including sensual lust, while the once-returner has destroyed only the first three fetters and weakened greed, hate and delusion, and the streamwinner only destroyed the first three fetters.

As such, in early Buddhism, celibacy is not a reaction against sexuality, taking it to be evil and so on, but rather, understanding its productive and fettering powers, the practitioner periodically abstains from such an indulgence so that his energies are undistracted and fully directed to spiritual training. The body, as it were, is in full service of the spirit, so that we are capable of rising beyond even the heavens.¹⁷⁶

6 Selfless persons

6.1 THE SELFLESS BODY. Useful as the body may be to a Buddhist, in terms of experiencing the joys of the lay life or the profound bliss of meditation, or as a vehicle of awakening, it is invariably regarded by all right-minded Buddhists as being selfless not self (*anattā*). The beginning of the path to awakening is the total rejection of the self-identity view (*sakkāya, ditthi*, literally “the view that there *is* a body”).¹⁷⁷ The word “body” (*kāya*) here is not only the physical body, that is, the 4 elements or the five sense-faculties, but all the five aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*), that is, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness¹⁷⁸ [3.1]. This whole body-mind is not-self.

If this body-mind with which we relate to other and the world is a fiction, whatever narratives we spin with it must be fiction, too. Eternalists, such as God-believers find this not-self aspect of Buddhism a difficult and bitter pill to swallow. They want a world that is “real,” like one that is “created” by a God. But

¹⁷⁵ The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, ditthi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) clinging to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (or remorse) (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma, rāga*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters makes one a non-returner (*opapātika* or *anāgāmī*) (see **Ānāpāna-sati S**, M 118.10 = 7.13). This verse technically refers to the non-returner, but here is spoken of an arhat, one who has broken all 10 fetters: see **Laṭukikopama S** (M 66.17/1:454), SD 28.11.

¹⁷⁶ See further, **Sexuality**, SD 31.7.

¹⁷⁷ Cf Collins 1982: 93.

¹⁷⁸ **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.2-6/1:299 f); (**Sakkāya**) **Anta S** (S 22.103/3:158), **Khīra, rukkha S** (S 35.231/4:159-162).

can something put together by an unseen being, not matter how supreme, be real? When we do not even know such a God's mind, how can we know his creation?

Materialists, with their nihilist bent, too, dislike this idea of an “as if” world. They want their pleasures and rewards to be palpable and real. Nothing is more false to such a materialist than his own self-centred ego-spun world. Understandably, he easily becomes bored with the things he collects, because they never really bring his true joy. Only in the *act* of collecting, he feels a whiff of uncertain satisfaction. He keeps feeding the self, but it is never satiated; for, it does not exist.

It is a heartless wrong view to say that Buddhists do not enjoy the night sky of Tekapo and Mt Cook in New Zealand, or the fjords of Norway, or the sunset off the Greek island of Santorini or off Sentosa. A Buddhist would not say that they are beautiful because “God made them,” but because they are *impermanent*, because we have to be there to *feel* it; you cannot take any of these “things” away. There is nothing to be attached to here; there is nothing to take away. We become the expanse of the Tekapo starry night sky; we soar with the heights of the Norwegian fjords; we rest with the setting Santorini or Sentosa sun.

A most beautiful thing is that as practising Buddhists, we do not a Tekapo starry sky, or a Norwegian fjord, or a Santorini or Sentosa sunset, to be happy: we are *just* happy wherever we are; even in pain or in difficulties. For, we know they are all impermanent.

6.2 THE BODY AND STREAMWINNING. In soteriological terms, the first thing that we need to do as a true Buddhist is to let go of the self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), that is, the notion that there is anything essentially unchanging or permanent in our body or mind. In simple terms, we say that whatever that exists must be either physical (a thing) or mental (a conceived state). Either an existent must be impermanent. In essence, this is the understanding we need to let go of the self-identity view.

Once we accept that we are impermanent—our body is impermanent, our feelings are impermanent, our perceptions are impermanent, our karmic acts are impermanent, our consciousness is impermanent—we easily abandon the self-identity view.

With this understanding, we no more depend on any external support for meaning in life or for happiness. The most common expression of this need for external support is through a dependence on rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata parāmāsa*). This is based on the misunderstanding that our lives and destinies are determined by external forces beyond our control.

To doubt here means to be unwilling or unable to act for our own good. This doubt is reinforced by the false view that the answer lies *outside* of ourselves—in a guru, a supreme being, a magical thing, or a mantra, or a ritual—but the truth is that we create our own hindrances.

Since whatever exists are necessarily impermanent, on what can we ever depend for any meaning or comfort in life? We can only depend on our minds, on how we see things. When we accept the fact that we *can* help ourselves, we overcome doubt (*vicikicchā*).

The Okkanti Saṃyutta (Saṃyutta ch 25)¹⁷⁹ contains ten discourses that show how by reflecting on different aspects of our body or its processes as being impermanent, we begin our journey on the path of spiritual liberation. More specifically, the Buddha guarantees that we will attain streamwinning (*sotāpanna*), the first stage of liberation, in this life itself, certainly at the moment of passing away.¹⁸⁰

What is interesting about these ten discourses is that they all declare that you can accept the truth of impermanence either simply through wisdom or through faith. Accepting the truth of impermanence through wisdom entails Dharma study, listening to Suttas, investigating the Teaching, meditation and so on. But it makes sense that we could easily accept the truth of impermanence. We can deny God, but we can never deny impermanence, It is all around us, and inside us. This is the simplest and most effective plan for spiritual liberation there is!

7 The Buddha's body

7.1 THE BUDDHA DEIFIED. We have so far most examined our body as unawakened beings. Let us now look at the Buddha's body. In **the (Pāda) Doṇa Sutta** (A 4.36), when the Buddha is asked by a the

¹⁷⁹ S 25/3:225-228.

¹⁸⁰ See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225) & SD 16.7 Streamwinner(1).

brahmin Doṇa, foot-print reader, whether he (the Buddha) would be reborn as a god, a heavenly minstrel, a nature spirit or a human, the Buddha replies that no such class applies to him: he is only *in* the world but not *of* the world, just as a lotus standing above the waters.¹⁸¹

However, even the lotus has its roots in the mud of the world. The Buddha appears as a human being, and indeed he is a human up to the point of his awakening. After that, he still has a human *body*, but his mind is unfathomable.¹⁸² The body, being of the world (as the 4 elements), remains in the world, as it were.

Here, we see an interesting difference between early Buddhism and later Buddhism, including the Mahāyāna. While early Buddhism (that is, pre-sectarian teachings) maintain that only the Buddha's consciousness awakens to true reality, the latter-day Buddhist theologians view that both the Buddha's body and mind attains nirvana. Such a view easily becomes the basis for the deification of the Buddha. The early Buddhists take the Buddha as a *superman* (*mahā.purisa*), the latter-day Buddhists regard him as a super-god (*devāti, deva*).

Elsewhere I have discussed how the denial of a great teacher's death could have been difficult for the unawakened, who then needed to theologize a Buddhology so that he is beyond death.¹⁸³ Just as those who have not loved the living who are significant to them might feel guilt-ridden by their deaths, and so resort to elaborate and expensive post-mortem rituals as a show of devotion and filial piety, those who are unable or unwilling to accept the early teachings, have to invent pious stories and myths to mollify their guilt or justify their failures.

This is true of both scholastic and ritualistic forms of Buddhism. While the scholastics stand on their books and scripture to reach greater heights in understanding what is beyond thought (*acinteyya*), the ritualists try to use external forms (sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches) to find solace in Buddhas and their forms in distant paradises, and commune with them. In either case, there is almost no need for looking into the body or the mind in the way the Buddha and the early disciples have done: there is no need to meditate nor to be mindful.

7.2 THE GREAT MAN. Attempt to deify the Buddha started early in Buddhist history, probably even in the Buddha's time itself. With the first few centuries of the Buddha's death, when the Suttas were put together, we find canonical narrative texts such as **the Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (D 30) glorifying the Buddha as being endowed with the 32 marks of the superman (*mahā.purisa, lakkhaṇa*).¹⁸⁴ However, a careful study of the internal evidence from the early texts clearly shows that this attribution is significantly late.

The canonical term for "superman" here is *mahā.purisa* (literally, "great man or person"). The earliest mention of a *mahā.purisa* is probably in **the Pārāyana Vagga** of the Sutta Nipāta, both of which belongs to the earliest strata of the Pali canon.¹⁸⁵ In **the Tissa,metteyya Māṇava Pucchā** (Sn 5.3), the brahmin Tissa Metteyya asks the Buddha as to whom does he call a *mahā.purisa*.¹⁸⁶

<p>1040 <i>Ko'dha santusito loke</i> <i>(icc-āyasmā Tisso Metteyyo)</i> <i>kassa no santi iñjitā</i> <i>ko ubh'antam abhiññāya</i> <i>majjhe mantā na lippati</i> <i>kaṃ brūsi mahā.puriso ti</i></p>	<p>Who is contented in this world? (asks the venerable Tissa Metteyya, for whom are there no mental agitations? Who, knowing both ends [extremes], is a thinker, who clings not to the middle? Whom do you call a great person?</p>
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¹⁸¹ A 4.36/2:37 f @ SD 36.13; see **The Person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b (5.2).

¹⁸² See **The Person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b (5.2; 8).

¹⁸³ See **How Buddhism Became Chinese**, SD 40b.3 (3.1-3).

¹⁸⁴ D 30/3:142-179 @ SD 36.9.

¹⁸⁵ Sn ch 5 (last ch) = Sn 976-1149; but its Preamble (*vatthu, gāthā*) is late. See Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pali Literature*, 1996: §§ 94, 98, 116.

¹⁸⁶ The full tr is "Whom do you call a great man, who has gone beyond the seamstress here?" (*kaṃ brūsi mahā.puriso ti, ko idha sibbanim accagā*, Sn 1040d).

	<i>ko idha sibbanim accagā.</i>	Who has gone beyond the seamstress ¹⁸⁷ here?
1041	<i>Kāmesu brahma, cariyavā (Metteyyā ti Bhagavā) vīta, taṇho sadā sato saṅkhāya nibbuto bhikkhu majjhe mantā na lippati taṃ brūmi mahā, puriso ti so idha sibbanim accagā 'ti.</i>	Who lives the holy life [is celibate] amidst sense-pleasures, (Metteyya, said the Blessed One,) with craving gone, ever mindful, after considering, ¹⁸⁸ he is a quenched monk, a thinker who sticks not to the middle— Him I call a great man— he has gone beyond the seamstress here. (Sn 1041 f)

What is beautiful about this passage (like most of the early Buddhist passages) is its lack of technical terms. The language is practically colloquial and figurative. The true monk is one who has abandoned craving through keeping to the monastic training of properly using the supports of life. In this way, he is not under the power of the seamstress, that is, craving. He is a “great man,” clearly referring to the arhat. The tone here is ethical throughout.

The Dhammapada gives a similar definition of the great man:

<i>Vīta, taṇho anādāno nirutti, pada, kovido akkharānaṃ sannipātāṃ jaññā pubbāparāṇi ca sa ve antima, sāriro mahā, pañño mahā, puriso 'ti vuccati.</i>	Who is without craving, without grasping, skilled in language and words; in the arrangement of letters [sounds], ¹⁸⁹ he knows what comes before and after— he is indeed the bearer of the last body, greatly wise, he is called a great man. (Dh 352)
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Language, spelling and learning are not only what are meant here. It is a play on the Upanishadic *akṣara*, the imperishable word of truth. The import is that the “great man” (the arhat) is well versed in the nature of truth since he has realized it.

In the **Mahā, purisa Sutta** (S 47.11), the Buddha tells Sāriputta that a “great man” is so called on account of his liberated mind, and that his mind is liberated through the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*sati'paṭṭhāna*).¹⁹⁰ The great man here refers to a meditator whose mind is liberated.

The **Anuruddha Mahā, vitakka Sutta** (A 8.30) records how the Buddha instructs the monk Anuruddha in his meditation leading up to his arhathood. The discourse concludes with the Buddha explaining these “eight thoughts of the great man” (*mahā, purisa, vitakka*), here referring to one who is practising for the attaining of arhathood:

14 “Bhikshus, I will teach you the eight thoughts of the great man. Pay close attention, I will speak.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” the monks answered the Buddha in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

“And what, bhikshus, are **the eight thoughts of the great man?**”

15 (1) This Dharma, bhikshus, is for one of few wishes, not for one with many wishes.

¹⁸⁷ “The seamstress” (*sibbani*) here is a personification of craving (*taṇhā*) (A 3:399; Dh 1059; NcA 10). The seamstress (or seamster = tailor) puts together clothing just as craving brings together the conditions for one’s continued being and suffering.

¹⁸⁸ Ie after considering impermanence, etc (SnA 589 = NcA 10). Foll the Suttas, *saṅkhāya* (abs) here better refers to mindful reflection by way of proper attention (*apassena*): see **Saṅgīti S** (D 33), where a monk lives supported by (*apassena*) considering what is to be habitually used (*paṭisevati*), what is to be endured (*adhivāseti*), what is to be avoided (*parivajjeti*), and what is to be removed (*vinodeti*) (D 33.1.11(8)/3:224). For details, see **Naḷaka, pāna S** (M 68.7/1:464), SD 37.4. Cf D 3:279,1-5 & M 1:464,13-15. See also Sn:N 404 n1041.

¹⁸⁹ Language, spelling and learning are not only what are meant here. It is a play on the Upanishadic *akṣara*, the imperishable word of truth. The import is that the “great man” (the arhat) is well versed in the nature of truth since he has realized it.

¹⁹⁰ S 47.11/5:158 @ SD 19.6. On *sati'paṭṭhāna*, see **Sati'paṭṭhāna S** (M 10/1:55-63), SD 13.3.

- (2) This Dharma, bhikshus, is for the contented, not for the discontented.
- (3) This Dharma, bhikshus, is for one in solitude [for the reclusive], not for one who delights in socializing.
- (4) This Dharma, bhikshus, is for one who puts forth effort [the energetic], not for the indolent [the lazy].
- (5) This Dharma, bhikshus, is for one established in mindfulness, not for one of confused mind.
- (6) This Dharma, bhikshus, is for one in samadhi [mental concentration], not for one without samadhi.
- (7) This Dharma, bhikshus, is for the wise, [233] not for the foolish.
- (8) This Dharma, bhikshus, is for one who rejoices in the non-proliferation of the mind, who delights in the non-proliferation of the mind, not for one who rejoices in mental proliferation, who delights in mental proliferation.

(A 8.30,14-31/4:232-235), SD 19.5

So far, we have seen the usage of the expression, the great man, in an ethical and spiritual context. The great man is a virtuous person, whose mind is liberated, and is either practising to be an arhat or has become one. **The Vassa,kāra Sutta** (A 4.35) brings us to another level of usage of the term. According to the discourse, Vassakāra, a chief minister of the rajah Ajāta,sattu, tells the Buddha that, to his understanding, a great man is one with these four characteristics:

- (1) he is greatly learned;
- (2) he understands what is spoken as soon as he hears it;
- (3) he has a good memory, able to recall what was said or done long ago;
- (4) he is skilled and diligent in the householder's duties.

When he asks for the Buddha's comments on what he has listed, the Buddha replies that he too has his definition of a great man, that is a person who using the Dharma establishes others in the right way (that is, the noble eightfold path), and has these four qualities:

- (1) he is able to think about what he wishes to; he does not think about what he does not wish to;
- (2) he intends what he wishes to; he does not intend what he does not wish to;
- (3) he is a master of his mind and thoughts, such that he is able to attain dhyana as the higher mind, at will, easily, without any trouble;
- (4) he has here and now fully destroyed the mental influxes, and is fully liberated through direct knowledge.¹⁹¹

(A 4.35/2:35-37)

Again here we see the emphasis is on mental development and meditation. The last quality refers to that of a full-fledged arhat.¹⁹²

7.3 THE BUDDHA AS SUPERMAN. We begin to see a new definition of the "great man" in a number of evidently late canonical discourses, namely, **the Mahā'padāna Sutta** (D 14),¹⁹³ **the Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (D 30),¹⁹⁴ and **the Brahmāyu Sutta** (M 91).¹⁹⁵ The 32 marks are alluded to in **the Ambattha Sutta** (D 3), where it is stated that that the thirty-two marks form a part of Ambattha's education,¹⁹⁶ and that they are

¹⁹¹ Abridged: *so āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ ceto,vimuttiṃ paññā,vimuttiṃ diṭṭh'eva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati.* **M 40.14/1:284, 41.43/289, 291, 120.37/3:103; S 55.24+25/5:377, 378; A 3.13/1:109, 3.85.5/1:232, 3.8.2/1:234, 3.100.10/1:256, 4.88.5/2:89, 4.159.5/2:146, 5.23.11/3:19, 5.28.20/3:29, 5.68.2/3:83, 7.15.9/4:13, 145, 9.35.3/4:422.**

¹⁹² See further **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30/3:142-179) @ SD 36.9 Intro.

¹⁹³ D 14/2:17-19; cf Mahā'vadāna Sūtra, ed Waldschmidt 101 f.

¹⁹⁴ D 30/3:143 f @ SD 36.9. According to **Lakkhaṇa S**, these marks are entirely the result of past good deeds, and can only continue in the present life by means of current goodness.

¹⁹⁵ M 91/2:136 f.

¹⁹⁶ D 3.1.3/1:88 @ SD 21.3.

found in the brahminical mantras. Furthermore, in the Buddhist hagiographies, it is a brahmin who ascertains the thirty-two marks of a Buddha.¹⁹⁷

From the Suttas, we are often given the impression that the Buddha looks very much like any other venerable monk. Just as the Buddha makes the Vinaya rules, he keeps to them, too: As I say, so I do; as I do, so I say” (*yathā,vādī tathā,kārī, yathā,kārī tathā,vādī*).¹⁹⁸ In other words, the Buddha keeps his head shaven, and he wears rag-robles just like any other good monk. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that on many occasions not everyone is able at once recognize the Buddha on seeing him; for example,

- (1) **the Sāmaññaphala Sutta** (D 2) records that Ajātasattu has to ask Jīvaka which of the monks in the assembly is the Buddha (D 2.11/1:50); and
- (2) **the Dhātu,vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 140) records how the monk Pukkusāti recognizes the Buddha only after discovering the similarities of the teachings that they profess (but MA here, however, says that the Buddha willfully hides his marks to avoid detection) (M 140/3:237-247).¹⁹⁹

It is also interesting that there is no evidence of the marks of the great man” tradition found in the Vedas or the Upanishads, or any other brahminical texts, except perhaps the myth of the *mahā,puruṣa* (cosmic primordial man) found in hymn 10.90 of the Rigveda. However, from such discourses as **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27), we find the Buddha satirizing such concepts rather than resorting to them for authentication. Moreover, as we have seen, although we often find the term *mahā,purisa* in the ancient texts [7.2], none of them ever remotely allude to his “marks” (*lakkhana*).

It is likely, however, that the conception of the *mahā,purisa*, which is intimately linked with that of the *cakka,vatti* (Skt *cakra,vartī*) (the world ruler or emperor), became popular during the time of emperor Ashoka. The Buddhist conception of kingship, as we know, became popular in mediaeval south-east Asia, and even today, legitimizes the Thai kingship.

In short, the conception of the great man with his marks was a post-Buddha development which evolved to glorify or deify the dead Buddha. This was one of seminal ideas that went on to apotheosize the Buddha into a docetic²⁰⁰ saviour of the Mahāyāna, turning him into some sort of God above the gods, an almighty supreme being.

7.4 HOW NOT TO LOOK AT THE BUDDHA

7.4.1 See for yourself. One of the very first and very last act of the Buddha is to place the Dharma above even himself. **The Gārava Sutta** (S 6.2) records how the Buddha reflects over his need of a spiritual teacher to show deference to. If a proper teacher cannot be found, then, he reflects, the Teaching should be respected.²⁰¹ In his last days, as recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), the Buddha similarly admonishes us that “the Dharma and Vinaya will, at my passing, be your refuge.”²⁰²

On a more practical level, the Buddha admonishes us to

¹⁹⁷ For example, D 1:89, 114, 120; A 1:163; M 2:136; Sn 600, 1000.

¹⁹⁸ D 2:224, 229, 3:135; M 1:108, 109; A 2:24; It 122; Sn 357 (Nigrodha,kappa); J 326/3:89.

¹⁹⁹ See **The person in Buddhism, SD 29.6b** (4.2.1).

²⁰⁰ **Doceticism** in Buddhism describes a mostly Mahayana tendency to regard the Buddha as a kind of “emanation” (*nirmāṇa,kāya*) of a cosmic Buddhist (eg *dhamma,kāya* or *ādi,buddha*). As such, the Buddha’s acts on earth are merely illusory for the benefit of beings here. This also means that the Buddha does not really need to perform human routines (like the toilet), or even die, but he only appears to do so for the sake of appearing as one of us for our benefit and salvation. A sort of combination of doceticism and the avatar doctrine can be found in the Mahayana conception of Bodhisattvas. By the 3rd cent, Mahayana literature being translated in China reflects major shifts that had occurred in Indian Buddhism. The new texts presented a new form of Bodhisattvas who were viewed as “either the manifestations of a Buddha or they are beings who possess the power of producing many bodies through great feats of magical transformation” (Lancaster 1981:154). Such Bodhisattvas are often called “Cosmic” or “Celestial” Bodhisattvas, and include such figures as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjūśrī and Kṣitigarbha.

²⁰¹ S 6.2/1:138-140 @ SD 12.3, nearly identical with **Uruvela S 1** (A 4.21/2:20 f).

²⁰² D 16.6.1/2:154 @ SD 9.

... dwell with yourself as an island, with yourself as refuge, with no other refuge—dwell with the Dharma as an island, with the Dharma as refuge, with no other refuge.²⁰³

And how is this done? The Buddha's proclamation on self-refuge is immediately followed by the advice to practise the four focusses of mindfulness, that is, with body-based, feeling-based, mind-based and reality-based meditations [2.1].

The import of the Buddha's instruction here is very clear: self-refuge means meditation as a means of self-knowledge, self-realization and self-liberation. Be an island in the sea or river of suffering, so that other those ship-wrecked and awash in the waters could find safe ground. In the end, when all the waters of samsara are drained by the wisdom of awakening, we will see that all there are only tall, solid, beautiful mountains separated by beautiful valleys once filled with samsaric waters.

7.4.2 Seeing the Dharma. In Buddhist training, we begin by taming our body and speech to be morally virtuous, that is, to bring mutual happiness wherever we are (and beyond) without harming ourselves, others or the environment.²⁰⁴ Such a moral virtue forms the foundation for common happiness that conduces to personal development and mental cultivation, which result in insight wisdom, that is, a clear vision *into* reality, not just superficially looking at the surface of things.

All this means that we have to learn to *read* people, and not just treat them merely as useful or pleasurable skin and features. To read others is to see their three characteristics. **The Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87) preserves such a teaching for our benefit. The sick monk Vakkali tells the Buddha that being indisposed, he regrets not being able to *see* him.²⁰⁵

“For a long time, venerable sir, I have wanted to come and see²⁰⁶ the Blessed One, but I do not have enough strength in my body to visit the Blessed One to see him.”

13 “Enough, Vakkali! What is there to see of this foul body? **One who sees the Dharma sees me; one who sees me, sees the Dharma.**²⁰⁷ For in seeing the Dharma, Vakkali, one sees me, and in seeing me, one sees the Dharma.

14 What do you think, Vakkali: is form permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, venerable sir.”

“Is the impermanent suffering or happiness?”

“Suffering, venerable sir.”

“Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self?’”

“No, venerable sir.”

“What do you think, bhikshus, is feeling permanent or impermanent?...”

“What do you think, bhikshus, is perception permanent or impermanent?...”

“What do you think, bhikshus, are mental formations permanent or impermanent?...”

“What do you think, bhikshus, is consciousness permanent or impermanent?...”

²⁰³ *Tasmā-t-ih'Ānanda atta,dīpā viharatha atta,saraṇā anañña,saraṇā, dhamma,dīpā dhamma,saraṇā anañña,-saraṇā* (D 16.2.26/2:100 = 26.1/3:58, 26.27/77; S 22.43/3:42, 47.9/5:154, 47.13/5:163, 47.14/5:164): many of them at different venues and to different interlocutors. On the tr of *dīpa* here as “island” or as “lamp” & discussion, see SD 9 Streamwinner(6a).

²⁰⁴ This is the golden rule: see **Amba,laṭṭhika Rāhu'ovāda S** (M 61.9-17/1:415-419), SD 3.10; see **Veḷu,dvār-eyya S** (S 55.7) for a broader application, where a wholesome action should be “purified” in three ways, ie by observing them oneself, by exhorting others to observe them, and by praising such deeds (S 55.7.6-12/5:354 f).

²⁰⁵ See Mroznik 2007: 84 f.

²⁰⁶ “Come and see the Blessed One,” *Bhagavantam dassanāya upasāṅkamitu,kāmo*. Evidently, the emphasis here is on the seeing of the Buddha in a physical sense.

²⁰⁷ *Yo kho Vakkali dhammam passati so maṃ passati; yo maṃ passati so dhammam passati*. The **Attha,sālinī** remarks that “seeing is not by the eye but by insight” (DhsA 350) SA: Here the Blessed One shows himself as the Dharma-body, as stated in the passage “The Tathāgata, the great king, is the Dharma-body” [untraced]. For the nine-fold supramundane Dharma [4 paths, their fruits, Nirvana] is called the Tathāgata's body. (SA 2:314) Bodhi thinks Comy misquoted the reference to a statement in **Aggañña S** (D 27) (S:B 1081 n168). See Intro above.

“Impermanent, venerable sir.”

“Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?”

“Suffering, venerable sir.”

“Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self’?”

“No, venerable sir.”

15 “Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—one sees all form as it really is with right wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Any kind of feeling whatsoever...thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Any kind of perception whatsoever...thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Any kind of mental formations whatsoever...thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Any kind of consciousness whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—one sees all consciousness as it really is with right wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

16 Seeing thus, a well-taught noble disciple becomes revulsed with form, revulsed with feeling, revulsed with perception, revulsed with mental formations, revulsed with consciousness.

Being (thus) revulsed, (his lust) fades away. Through the fading away (of lust) [that is, dispassion], (his mind) is liberated.

When it is liberated, there comes the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ He directly knows: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more of this state of being.’”
(S 22.87.12-16/3:120 f), SD 8.8

7.3 HOW TO LOOK AT THE BUDDHA. Why are we so fascinated at looking at bodies? Let us broaden the question: who are we as *animals* so fascinated at looking at bodies? One possible answer is that these bodies serve as mating partners to perpetuate the species, or as food to sustain the present body. Unawakened humans are likely to see other human bodies in the same way, except on a more sophisticated level, that is, the physical body evokes a sense of power and permanence.

This is where the problem begins: when we look at the physical body in a manner that is more than what it really is. Let us remind ourselves of how the Buddha defines the body: “This body is form made up of the 4 primary elements [3.3], born from mother and father, built up on rice and porridge, subject to impermanence, rubbing, pressing, breaking up, and crumbling. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here.”²⁰⁸ [1.3.1]

We should see our own body in this way: it consists of matter, biologically re-assembled, sustained on food, and is impermanent, unsatisfactory and without any abiding essence. There is nothing evil about the body; this is just the way it is. When we accept this, we are heading in the direction of self-knowledge and inner stillness.

This inner peace transform our physical being into a body of light of increasing radiance as we progress deeper and higher in our mental development. This is the most attractive kind of human body there can be. A body that is so still even in its movements, so beautiful and peaceful just to behold. This is the kind of body the wanderer Sāriputta sees in the ascetic Assaji during their first meeting. It is a meeting than transformed Sāriputta’s life; for, when Assaji’s body was put into words, Sāriputta is able to abandon his self-identity view, attachment to rituals and vows, and doubt: he became a streamwinner (V 1:40).²⁰⁹ This is the kind of body that we are admonished by the Buddha to cultivate.

²⁰⁸ D 2; M 23, 109; S 35.105; A 9.15, 55.21; J 12.

²⁰⁹ See SD 10.4 (2.5).

8 Conclusion

From all that has been said here, we can confidently say that Buddhism is about cultivating the body to cultivate the mind, for the sake of gaining liberating insight. The bodies we have are the material effects, that is, karmic fruits, of our moral virtue, and which are the conditions for further practice of such moral virtue. Such bodies can influence others to cultivate moral virtue themselves.²¹⁰ We have also seen that certain bodily features (like a gentle smile), postures (meditation-wise) and movements (bowing down before a sacred image or others) are themselves virtuous acts.

A practising Buddhist is an embodiment of the Dharma, or a Dharma-embodied being who works to benefit others. When we have a community of such bodies, it is a spiritual community founded on moral virtue or natural morality. Such a community also provides the ideal environment for personal and mental development, as it is the closest we can possibly get to an ideal society.

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[See also Bibliography of SD 29.6b]

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²¹⁰ See Susanne Mrozik 2002: 3f (digital ed).

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